THE

FARMER

OF

INGLEWOOD FOREST.

A NOVEL.

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INGLEWOOD FOREST.

A Novel.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY

ELIZABETH HELME,

AUTHOR OF

LOUISA, OR THE COTTAGE ON THE MOOR, DUNCAN AND PEGGY, ... OF THE ISLES, THE PENITENT OF GODSTOW, MODERN TIMES, ... OF THE CROSS, ALBERT OF STRATHNAVERN,

&c. &c.

'We do not always find visible happiness in proportion to visible virtue: natural, and almost all political, evil, are incident alike to the bad and good. All that virtue can afford is quietness of conscience, and a prospect of a happier state.'

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CHAPTER I.

AGNES had retired, with a mind too much disturbed by the visible uneasiness of Edwin to fall asleep, and immediately started on his entrance; for she heard him not until he opened the chamber door and addressed her, so cautiously had he stepped along the little passage that separated her room from the other apartments. For a moment she felt displeased at his intrusion, but her heart

was too guileless to suspect his purpose, and affection and pity mastering every other sentiment, she replied to his address—"Retire, I entreat you, Edwin. Were you not so visibly uneasy I could not forbear to chide you—we will speak more fully to-morrow. You are displeased at William without cause; he is at once a kind brother, and a prudent and disinterested friend. Banish then these thoughts that disturb you; all, I doubt not, will be for the best."

Edwin, who was charmed to meet with so gentle a repulse, replied—"And can you, Agnes, so easily adopt his unfeeling maxims? But why do I ask, when I see you do? Absence has weakened your affection for me, and it costs you no pang to doom me to misery!"

"Cruel, unjust surmise!" replied Agness, ready to burst into tears; "had your affection been as great as mine, you had never, Edwin, sought a change. No preferment, no greatness, should have

tempted

tempted me to quit you; but I am wrong to speak in a manner you may construe upbraidingly. Your mind, my Edwin, is disturbed. Retire, I again conjure you, to your rest—this is no place. In the morning you shall be convinced that you are offended without cause."

"And will you not, Agnes," replied he, "allow me a single half-hour's conversation alone this last evening I have to remain with you? Will you suffer me to depart, overpowered as I am with anguish?"

"Good Heaven! what would you request? You know, Edwin, your uneasiness distresses me more than my own; but go down—if you desire it, I will rise and join you in a few minutes."

"No," replied he, "we shall but awaken the family, which will prevent me disclosing what I wish to say to you alone. Can you not, my love, suffer me for a few minutes to converse with you here? You were not wont to distrust

 your

your Edwin—have I, Agnes, deserved suspicion?"

"No, Heaven forbid!" replied the unsuspecting victim. "Withdraw while I dress—we can converse for a short time at the window."

Edwin, though he scarcely knew how to command himself, immediately obeyed by retiring into the passage, where he remained some minutes, then joined her at the window of her own apartment. Persuaded it was his last resource, he redoubled his former vows, until he thought her heart sufficiently softened to his purpose, then entreated her, though with some cautious preliminaries, to prove her affection by accompanying him to town.

"Why will you ask me what you know is impossible?" replied she. "Does not our parents think it wrong?—and you as well as me, Edwin, used to be satisfied

satisfied with their decision; but you are grown strangely impetuous. A little time cannot surely make much difference, and then it will be my duty, as well as inclination, to accompany you wherever you go."

"Ah, Agnes," replied he, "if you loved me, you would not thus calmly speak of a separation, though even for a short time. My first leaving the Forest was, I can truly swear, to procure you additional happiness as well as myself. Our hearts, my beloved girl, have long been united; you can neither doubt my honour nor my love. Consent then to go with me to town; and let us never more be separated."

"How can you press what you know is impracticable? Has it not been express-denied?"

"But—but," hesitated he, "could we not, my beloved, find means to go without their permission? It surely,

Agnes, would be a very venial trespass. We could be married immediately; and you cannot doubt but we should be forgiven."

"And do you think I would be guilty of so cruel and despicable an act?" replied she indignantly, attempting to withdraw her hand. "No, Edwin, my love for you, I confess, is interwoven with my life, but neither love nor life itself shall make me so ungrateful and unworthy of the best of friends and parents, for yours, Edwin, are already mine; and shall I cloud their venerable features with sorrow, and wound their worthy hearts? No,—you are not yourself, or you could not have proposed it."

Though Edwin found his scheme completely frustrated by this reply, he yet determined not to relinquish his purpose, and summoning all his arts, by soothing and protestations, he at length removed

removed the uneasiness his proposal had given, and his pardon was sealed on her lips.

"And now, Edwin," said she, "retire, forget all vexation, and believe me entirely yours."

"Yet a moment," replied he; "in what haste you are to banish me! Are you not my wife in all but the name? Suffer me then, my love, to place this ring upon your finger," drawing one from his own (which had been presented him by Mrs. Delmer), and putting it on hers, "and swear, Agnes, you will never give yourself to another."

"Alas!" said Agnes, "I know not what strange idea has possessed you! Have I not frequently given you that assurance, and can an oath be more binding? Surely not. I never repeated one in my life, and have frequently wished you would not, for they ever leave an uneasy sensation on my heart."

 "You

"You refuse me then, Agnes," replied he, striking his forehead with his hand, "and I shall, accursed thought! lose you for ever."

"Good Heaven, how you terrify me!" said Agnes, trembling at his agitation: "how can you doubt me? But dictate what I am to say, and I will repeat it, if that will restore you to calmness."

Edwin now proposed the oath, and the gentle Agnes, sinking on her knees, exclaimed—"Heaven forgive me for an act against which my heart recoils! but here I call God to witness never to have another love, and if you are not my husband, to die unmarried."

"Enough, enough!" cried Edwin, exultingly; "my heart is now satisfied—you are my wife, and from this hour I claim you as my own."

Her gentle spirits were overpowered with the scene that had taken place; her head sunk on Edwin's bosom, and she could

could scarcely preserve herself from fainting. In that fatal moment the guardian angel of virtue and innocence for a short time left the unhappy and too susceptible Agnes—and the villain Edwin succeeded in his infernal purpose.

Daughters of chastity, condemn not—but pity! May example warn you that secrecy and temptation are ever to be avoided!

The triumphant miscreant had now no doubt but that all his desires would be complied with; he therefore again pressed her to accompany him, unknown to their parents, but in vain.

"No!" cried she, weeping bitterly. "It is true you have rendered me unworthy of our friends and yourself, yet will I not add ingratitude to vice. Begone, Edwin, nor tempt me further: am I not already sunk enough in your opinion!

nion!—hateful folly—despicable weakness! Would to Heaven I had died yesterday—innocent and happy!"

Edwin exerted all his art and influence to calm her spirits; and disappointed in his views of persuading her to accompany him clandestinely, changed his plan, sparing no vows to convince her of his fixed intention to return in the course of a month and espouse her, being determined, if possible, to keep his marriage for that time private, and in the interim fix on some scheme to get her into his power.

His repeated promises in some measure calmed her agitation; but she still pressed his absence, with an earnestness that all his arts could not overcome; and he was at length necessitated, though sorely against his will, to return to his chamber, as the only mea[illegible] to keep her

sorrow

sorrow within bounds; for he dreaded lest it should be heard by the family.

The remainder of the night was passed by the unhappy Agnes in self-reproaches and tears, her heart weakly endeavouring to exculpate her betrayer. For the first time the dawn of morning was displeasing to her; she shuddered to appear before her friends, and dreaded every eye, lest her conscious face should disclose the weakness she had been guilty of.

In the morning her disorder and confusion were visible to the whole family; but all attributed it to the same motive, the approaching departure of Edwin, and endeavoured to console and cheer her; but in vain: she felt herself unworthy of their caresses, and shrunk from them. Nor was Edwin more calm, though actuated by very different motives; triumphant villany, it is true, sat

enthroned within his heart; but yet he was uncertain whether he might not for ever lose Agnes, of whom he was now more passionately enamoured than ever.

Edwin, though he ardently wished to assume his new honours, could hardly determine to tear himself away, and therefore determined to protract his stay until the following morning, in order to exert his utmost endeavours in reassuring Agnes, whom, as he found he could by no means persuade to leave the Forest clandestinely, determined to return himself as speedily as possible, seduce her to some distance, then carry her off in spite of opposition, trusting to her affection to plead his excuse.

In the evening arrived Mrs. Delmer's second letter, containing the intelligence of Emma's elopement with Whitmore. This was delivered to Edwin when he chanced to be alone with William. Astonished

Astonished at receiving another so speedily, he hastily broke it open; but had no sooner glanced over the contents, than art, and its attendant dissimulation, for a moment forsook him.—"Damnation seize the villain!" exclaimed he, aloud, regardless of William, and almost insensible he was present: "I will pursue him to the verge of hell; am I to be thus immediately punished?"

"Good Heaven, Edwin!" replied William, starting, "what do you mean? What has happened? Speak, brother; why are your features thus disturbed with mingled rage and anguish? Are we not both the fruit of one kindly shrub? Why will you then unkindly have a separate interest? for surely withholding your thoughts must be thus interpreted. My whole heart is yours; read it, it is open as my speech to a beloved brother."

"Alas, William!" replied Edwin, shrinking within himself, "what do you ask?

ask? I—I—I have no secrets, or if I had, what could it answer to rack your bosom?"

"If you are so insensible to the consolations of friendship," returned William, "to prize them so lightly, I will endeavour, though reluctantly, to withdraw my claim; my heart has hitherto forced me to be an intruder in your interest: I will, however, hereafter strive not to hold it so inseparable with my own, until, at least, you are cured of this delirium of folly and grandeur; then, my brother, will I forget your unkindness, and again open my arms and heart to receive you. One only thing, Edwin, would I wish to ask: if you have a subject for unhappiness, is London a place for Emma? Can she be prudently left there alone?"

"Damn her!" involuntarily replied Edwin.

William made no answer; he was unequal

equal to any; he cast an eye of anguish on his brother, and dropped on a chair in silence.

At that instant entered Godwin, with his wife and Fanny, when both brothers endeavoured to conceal their uneasiness, though from different motives; Edwin to hide his own villany, and William to prevent their hearts being agonized with he knew not what, and what he wished, but dreaded to hear.

Edwin was a far better dissembler than his brother, and first overcame his confusion; simply informing his friends that he had received another letter, pressing his immediate return; but that he hoped to see them again in the space of a month at farthest; that he would now take one of their horses to the next market-town, from whence he could immediately procure a conveyance.

His venerable parents would have questioned him respecting this repeated and peremptory call, but Edwin appeared so enclosed in reserve and caution, that the good man, with a sigh, withdrew his suit; and observing his son's impatience to be gone, told him to take any of the horses he approved; and fearing his uneasiness might proceed from want of money, pressed him with a supply, which, however, Edwin declined, even to obstinacy. He then left the party, and hastened to take leave of Agnes, who was locked in her chamber, for the first time, perhaps, in her life; but she wished now to conceal herself from herself: but conscience, doubly poignant from sensibility and wounded virtue, had fixed a barbed arrow in her bosom, which she could never withdraw, nor whose anguish she could palliate.

Edwin calling, she however replied —"I will attend you directly below;" and

and opening the door, with a sigh, pass-ed him and descended the stairs, he in vain attempting to detain her.

By this time he had entirely recovered his confusion; and renewing his pro-mises, he received their affectionate fare-well, departing in two hours after the receipt of his last letter.

CHAP-

CHAPTER II.



Edwin was no sooner departed, than William, drawing his father aside, with caution informed him of Edwin's discomposure at receiving the letter.—"Believe me, my dear sir," said he, "I should not have mentioned it, had I not thought it for his happiness. Edwin's good-nature, and, if I may call it so, constitutional cheerfulness, may, I doubt, have drawn him into some difficulty, from which he cannot extricate himself. I almost fear to speak my wishes, yet why should I hesitate? You have frequently honoured me by calling me your representative; would you condescend to make me such now, I would go to London, and examine into the immediate situation of Edwin; if he has any pecuniary

pecuniary difficulties, remove them; and, finally, bring down Emma, whom I well know you wish returned."

Godwin for a moment regarded his son, unable to reply, tears falling down his cheeks. At length, embracing him, he said—"My son, my son, surely thou art the favoured gift of God! thou anticipatest my words, but not my wishes. I am not blind to the cloud that hangs over Edwin, but for thy offer should have suffered in silence, unable to develop it; let us then form some excuse for thy absence to thy mother, Fanny, and her gentle sister; as for Bernard, I will tell him our intention; and, I doubt not, he will applaud our honest deceit."

Bernard entering in the height of the conversation, was informed of the whole, under promise, however, of not revealing it to either of his daughters, which he firmly promised; in the mean time, good-

good-naturedly endeavouring to laugh them out of their fears, observing, he was sure Edwin was both a good and prudent lad; and for any difference in his behaviour, they should consider his change of situation, and that gentlemen had frequently more to ruffle their thoughts than farmers, though they might choose to keep it to themselves.

William, with his father's approbation, determined to depart on the following morning, and join his brother in London; and accordingly, at supper, Bernard, by agreement, asked him if he could contrive to set off on the next day to York, as he had a relation there who was sick, and that he was unable to ride so far on horseback himself?

William immediately expressed his willingness, and the affair was soon concluded, unsuspected by either Mrs. Godwin or Agnes; but the keen eye and

and attentive ear of tenderness were not so easily deceived; Fanny read the unusual gloom in her William's features, though determined to conceal her suspicions.

On their retiring to rest, William could not avoid observing Fanny was unhappy. She was silent, and appeared to press the young Reuben with redoubled affection to her bosom, while a tear would now and then escape her eye, and fall on his dimpled cheek.—"What is the matter, my love, my wife?" said William; "you are unhappy, and I have a right to claim a share."

"Forgive me," replied she, weeping, "but you are not, I think, going to York."

"Suppose I am not, where can I go that the remembrance of your tenderness and virtue will not cheer me? Dry your tears, love, and you shall hear my destination; for I know you will not disclose

disclose it to my mother or Agnes, whom I fear to alarm."—He then informed her of his determination of hastening to London, as he was rather uneasy at the behaviour of Edwin, and yet more concerned at the protracted stay of Emma.

Fanny entirely coincided in the prudence of his journey, while she grieved at its necessity, yet hoped all his fears were groundless; then promised to conceal her own uneasiness for the sake of his mother and Agnes; and, finally, entreated him, in such a great and hateful city (as she had heard it represented) to be careful of his own safety, and by no means to hurry back on her account, until his heart was fully satisfied in respect to his brother, "as," concluded she, "an inconsiderate haste might leave you still unhappy, and uninformed in respect of him. In the mean time, I will doubly caress Reuben, trace your features in the lineaments of his little visage, talk to him

him of your absence—of your return; while the unfeeling little varlet," concluded she, fondly kissing her babe, "will smile at both."

William caught her in his arms, alternately embracing her and the infant, then retired with her to rest, happy as the first created pair, before guilt had banished peace from their bosoms.

William arose at the dawn of day, and having taken an early breakfast with his family, departed on horseback for the metropolis, which he reached five days after his brother, who rode post the whole journey.

Edwin, on his arrival in town, had immediately gone to Mrs. Delmer's, who confirmed the vexatious tidings she had before sent him. At first his rage knew no bounds; he execrated Whitmore, Emma, and himself, nor did he spare

spare Mrs. Delmer in his passion; then rushing from the house, hastened to Whitmore's, where, however, he could learn nothing more than he already knew respecting their departure, but was presented by one of the domestics with a letter which had arrived three days before, and which bore a foreign post-mark. On opening it, he found it came from Whitmore, and contained these words:—



"DEAR EDWIN,

"You have stolen my sister; and as I hate to be outdone, I have stolen yours—it is but a mere exchange; yet, as I wish to act generously, and must confess that I have the best of the bargain, you are welcome to my wife to make up the deficiency. In the mean time, I wish you *all* the happiness attendant on the marriage-state. You pleased yourself—so have I; and I trust you

you have too much sense and knowledge of the world to be angry at the step I have taken, particularly when I assure you, that your sister is dearer to me than life, and that her happiness shall be my particular care. I presume you have heard of my affair with Darleville. I was too much of a philosopher to notice his amour with my wife; but to speak disrespectfully of my sister and my beloved Emma, was too much for even philosophy to bear. Adieu! I shall make the tour of France and Italy before I return, but if settled in any place for a time, you shall hear from me.

" *Calais.* WHITMORE."

Edwin's rage was redoubled by this epistle, with which, open in his hand, he flew to Mrs. Whitmore's apartment, expecting, that although the lady was faulty, she would, in this case, be as outrageous as himself; but he was disap-

pointed—she only laughed at his emotion, ridiculing him for being so vehemently exasperated at an occurrence which was so common in life, and that, if he had had the least penetration, must have foreseen.—"But what, in the name of wonder, does he say?" added she. "Does he congratulate you on your marriage? For my part, I knew of it a week after it took place, though I did not mention it to him, and gave you credit for an apt scholar, a pupil worthy your preceptor. But tell me, does the letter contain any secret? or may I see it?"

"Take it," replied Edwin, sullenly; "the letter at *least* is worthy the writer."

Mrs. Whitmore received it, but had not proceeded far when she began laughing immoderately.—"By my life," said she, "Whitmore is a delightful fellow, notwithstanding he treats me so cavalierly; was he not my husband, I should certainly

certainly be in love with him. Take my advice, Edwin, and do not, when you meet, quarrel about trifles. Believe me, you have, whatever he may say to the contrary, the best of the bargain, having not only the woman but the fortune; he the woman only. Which, I pray then, in the eye of common sense, has the advantage, even though *I* should not be thrown in to make up the deficiency?"

"But suppose," replied Edwin, half rallied from his vexation, "I should refuse any thing short of the full compensation?"

"Why, in that case," returned she, smiling, "I should say you was an avaricious wretch, and as bad as your patron."

This discourse was for some time pursued with the same degree of spirit, until the subject became so far realized, that Edwin at length departed, im-

pressed with the idea that he was completely revenged on Whitmore.

On Edwin's return he found the domestics at Mrs. Delmer's (who hereafter must be called Godwin) prepared to receive him as their master, the lady having declared her marriage. Though his promotion and this distinction would at any other time have gratified his pride, and overbalanced every other idea, yet now he accepted their attentions with coldness. His heart was torn with contending passions, which even his wished-for wealth could not alleviate—the departure of Emma, which almost drove him to despair, and the distempered frenzy of desire (which he called love) for Agnes. To pursue Emma without any certain route he knew would be vain; besides, his marriage in the mean time might reach Inglewood, and Agnes be lost for ever. This idea soon banished all thoughts of following Emma, whose

whose absence he, however, determined to keep secret as long as possible, at least until he got Agnes in his power.

Thus resolved, he endeavoured to conceal his discontent under the specious guise of uneasiness for his sister, his unsuspecting wife viewing him with too partial an eye to suspect his dissimulation.

Five days after, as before mentioned, arrived William, who repaired immediately to the house he thought Mrs. Delmer's, intending first to visit his sister, supposing Edwin still resided at Whitmore's. Though a stranger in London, as his direction was clear, he had not much difficulty to find it; and, tying his horse to the rails, knocked at the door, and inquired for the lady. William's good person and natural affability was with every one a powerful letter of recommendation; and the domestics im-

 mediately

mediately shewed him into an apartment, and requested his name.—"William Godwin," replied he; "tell her from Inglewood, and that I request to pay her my respects."

When the servants announced this unexpected visitor, Mrs. Godwin was alone; she was amazed, as she was certain Edwin knew not of his journey. He had told her that he had disclosed his marriage to his father and William only, who were to declare it on his departure, as he had no wish to distress Agnes, who, he said, he *feared* was yet rather attached to him. As for the elopement of Emma, that he informed her he could not resolve to mention, until at least he heard more of the business.

The parties were thus in mutual ignorance when they met, Mrs. Godwin shuddering that it fell to her lot to disclose

close the flight of his sister, particularly as it was with Whitmore.

Mrs. Godwin met him at the door, and holding out her hand, bade him welcome, expressing her sorrow that Edwin was gone out. This declaration struck William as nothing uncommon, as Edwin, he surmised, might just have paid her a visit. Having returned his compliments, his eyes wandered round the room in search of Emma.—"And my sister, madam," said he, "has long intruded on your kindness; I am charged with the thanks of my parents, and mean to take her home with me. At some future period, perhaps, you will condescend to honour us at Inglewood with a visit as you pass to your seat."

Mrs. Godwin bowed; she felt awkward that William did not congratulate

 her

her on her marriage, and knew not how to reply to him respecting Emma.

"You are silent, madam," said William, with an emotion he could not entirely suppress, observing she made no answer. "May I not see my sister?"

Thus urged, she could not avoid a reply.—"For pity's sake, Mr. Godwin," said she, "do not press the subject until Edwin's return; I expect him momentarily. You may believe me, whatever happens to disturb your family is distressing to me."

"If any thing has happened to my sister, for Heaven's sake disclose it instantly; my soul cannot bear suspense on a subject so near to us all. I truly confess I suspected something on Edwin's receiving the last letter, and could not rest satisfied until I hastened to town. Speak, madam, my distress is not immaterial; is Emma sick—dead? I can

I can hear of either as becomes a man—what I dread far more, disgraced herself and family!"

Mrs. Godwin still hesitated, until again pressed with an earnestness that almost shocked her, she replied—"Indeed, my dear Mr. Godwin, this unhappy business you may believe has greatly distressed me, particularly as the aggressor is my brother."

"Enough, madam," interrupted William, impatiently; "I have heard enough to plunge my unhappy parents into an untimely grave."

"My husband," resumed Mrs. Godwin, "would instantly have pursued them, but his absence, and the uncertainty of their route, made such a step fruitless; they can be traced no farther than Abbeville."

"Abandoned, deluded girl!" exclaimed William, his voice choked with contending passions, "is this the return you make your parents for eighteen

 years

years watchful tenderness — parents who never regarded you but with a smile? Ungrateful wretch! I will, however, if possible, find you; and if a spark of virtue remains in your bosom, endeavour to revive it. Pardon me, madam, I scarcely know what I say; I think that you kindly mentioned that *your* husband would have pursued them —excuse me, I did not know you was married: but why is Edwin supine in this cruel business?"

William's answer increased Mrs. Godwin's perplexity; he expressed his ignorance of her marriage, and spoke of her husband and Edwin as separate persons. —"You—you are, I fear, Mr. Godwin," replied she, "under some mistake."

"For Heaven's sake then, madam, condescend to set me right; if you can lessen my tortures, I will bless you; at least," concluded he, "I am sure you cannot increase them."

"I would it were in my power to re-

move

move them!" replied she. "What I have to say will not, however, augment them. I surely misunderstood Edwin when he informed me that he had divulged his marriage to his father and yourself."

"His marriage!" said William—"his marriage!" repeated he again, after a moment's pause; "whose marriage?—not surely my brother Edwin's?"

"Yes, sir, Edwin is my husband; we have been married these three months."

"*Your* husband! then you are married to a villain!" exclaimed he, throwing himself into a chair from whence he had just risen. "Great God! how blind is man! I thought my miseries incapable of increase, and they are now fallen fourfold on me. Parents—Agnes—Fanny—all—all will sink beneath this cruel stroke!"

"Surely, sir," interrupted Mrs. Godwin, haughtily, "Edwin's marriage with

 me

me cannot have increased your unhappiness?"

"You, perhaps, did not know of his engagements to Agnes; yet I thought you had. Excuse me, madam, I cannot stay; my mind is too much torn with anguish. Favour me with all you know respecting my unhappy sister; I would, if possible, seek her, but fear my labour would be vain. We will, if you please, banish all other subjects."

Mrs. Godwin then briefly related all she knew respecting the elopement of Emma with Whitmore; saying the advantage was taken unsuspected by her, and in her absence; and finally, that to pursue them would be useless, as their route was unknown.

When she concluded, William rose, and was about to take his leave, saying he should set off again immediately for the

the Forest, being uncertain what step to pursue until he had consulted with his father, as he dared not trust to writing, knowing the stroke would fall so heavy as to need all his precaution and care in divulging it.

"You will not, sure," said Mrs. Godwin, "depart until Edwin's return? Let me entreat your stay—he cannot be long, and would, I am convinced, blame me for suffering you to leave us so hastily."

"No, madam, he would rather thank you, had you even pressed my absence; but I must be gone," continued he, advancing towards the door, "and wish you more happiness than I have now to expect." With these words, in spite of her entreaties, he left her, and mounted his horse, first requesting the servant to direct him to Mr. Whitmore's.—"I will call there," said he, mentally, as he rode forward; "perhaps the villain belied his wife:

wife: from his conduct, it is more than probable he did. Edwin too confirmed his assertions; but what are the words of such men? I will go, and doubt not to find their character of her false! Perhaps she was too virtuous to countenance their villany, and possibly from thence arose their dislike of her."

Impressed with this idea, he rode to her house, determined to procure from the lady more certain information, not doubting but he should find her overwhelmed with sorrow; and firmly persuaded that all he had before heard to her disadvantage would prove false. On his arrival, fearful she should refuse to see him, from his consanguinity to Emma, he simply desired the servant to inform her, a person, on particular business, desired to speak to her.

The man led the way into an apartment, and desired him to be seated;

then

then proceeded to announce him in the adjoining room, and presently returning, informed him his mistress would wait on him presently.—William, now left alone, was for some moments lost in thought. The partition between the rooms being, however, slight, his meditations were soon interrupted by two voices, one of whom was singing—

> "Come, come, bid adieu to fear;
> Love and Harmony live here!
> No domestic jealous jars,
> Buzzing slanders, wordy wars,
> In my presence will appear,
> Love and Harmony reign here!

"But I will neither sing nor say any more till I have dispatched my visitor," continued the same voice. "By his nameless modesty it is, I suppose, one of Mr. Whitmore's creditors, with a bill as long as my arm; but I shall dispatch him in an instant."

With these words, the lady opened the door, and assuming more gravity, said—

said—" If you please, sir, I will now attend to your business.'

William, more overpowered than before with vexation to find he had called on so despicable a wretch, yet determined to advance and question her; but had no sooner entered the room than he became fixed as a statue with surprise and horror; for on a sofa sat lolling his brother Edwin, apparently quite at his ease. —" Amazement!" exclaimed Edwin, starting from his seat, hardly less astonished than William. " Is it possible? my brother!"

" No, you mistake," replied William, putting him back with his hand, for he had advanced towards him; " you have no brother; you lost him when you became a villain!"

The first idea that struck Edwin was, that his seduction of Agnes was discovered, and that he should lose her for ever: anger and distraction at this thought mastered

tered every other consideration; and humiliated to be thus treated before the haughty Mrs. Whitmore by his rustic brother—"A villain!" echoed he, seizing William by the arm: "dare not repeat it, lest I indeed forget our relationship."

"Yes," replied William, with equal heat, "a false and most despicable villain, destitute of honour and honesty! Nay, unhand me," continued he, shaking Edwin off, who appeared almost ready to strike him, "lest I should be tempted to chastise you on the spot."

Mrs. Whitmore, by this altercation, discovering her mistake in respect to the stranger, and fearing some mischief, screamed aloud, and violently pulled the bell; on which three servants rushed into the room, and in some measure calmed the impetuosity of both brothers.—"Edwin needs no protection," said William; "he is beneath my resentment. I came to inquire of my unhappy sister, whose fault

fault is already lessened, when I see what dangers her inexperience has been exposed to.

Mrs. Whitmore would, if possible, have adopted her usual haughtiness, but her behaviour, like an arrow drawn against an impenetrable target, only rebounded without injury to the object. He did not, it is true, return her scorn for scorn, but appeared to feel her efforts as little as doth a giant those of a pigmy. Edwin too, after the first exertion of passion, seemed sunk within himself, and blushing in spite of all his pride, to appear to owe his safety to the domestics, entreated Mrs. Whitmore to command their absence; which being at length complied with, unable to bear the presence of his brother, he rushed out of the room.

William, who was anxious to gain some intelligence of his sister, on Edwin's

win's leaving the apartment, made a cold apology to the lady for what had passed, and began the discourse nearest his heart; but finding he could procure no information, soon left her, and remounting his horse, with a heavy heart took his way towards Inglewood.

CHAP-

CHAPTER III.



When Edwin left his brother he hastened home, where he was soon informed of all that had passed in the interview between William and Mrs. Godwin, the lady not sparing her reproaches for his duplicity. Edwin was not in a temper to bear, much less palliate, and high words in consequence ensued. To a charge of ingratitude, he replied with a thousand curses against his own folly, until at length the lady retired highly displeased, Edwin neither endeavouring to detain nor sooth her.

No sooner was he alone than he gave way to the mingled passions that overwhelmed him.—"It is now complete!" exclaimed he; "I have gained the points on

on which I fixed my happiness—*wealth*, and the *possession* of Agnes, and yet am plunged in the depth of misery—misery too great for human nature to bear, for have I not lost all that made life desirable? Parents—Agnes—brother—that brother whose friendship was once so necessary to my happiness; he spurned me—despised me; that temper I never before saw ruffled with passion was now ungovernable! By hell, vice has made me a coward! had he even struck me, I think I could not have returned it. My sister dishonoured too! Accursed Whitmore, thou shalt pay for all, for thou art the original cause; the tempter that first seduced me from home, happiness, love, and virtue—that first taught me to laugh at vows, and gratify my passions at the expence of innocence and honour, mayest thou be as accursed as I! then annihilation will be mercy: yet had I but Agnes to sooth my cares, I could yet be comparatively happy!"

happy!" continued he, after a pause. "By Heaven, I will! they already hate, despise, and curse me—they can then do no more; and such a prize is worth a bold effort."

Towards evening he returned to Mrs. Whitmore, as he was curious to hear how his brother's visit had concluded, having no doubt but that he had immediately set out on his return for the country; he likewise wished, if possible, to escape from himself, and Mrs. Whitmore's levity was the most speedy palliative he could think of. As for his wife, now she began, as he surmised, to suspect his villany, she became almost hateful to him; so true it is, that not unfrequently the aggressor finds it most difficult to pardon.

Mrs. Whitmore rallied him on the whole transaction; his brother's behaviour she construed to proceed from his displeasure

displeasure respecting Emma, and a supposition that Edwin had not been sufficiently attentive to her; for anger at his marriage she had not the most distant idea of; nay, she was astonished that the satisfaction she supposed he must feel from that circumstance had not obliterated all other ideas.—" I think," said she, " he might at least have behaved with more politeness before me; but what, in the name of wonder, would the handsome rustic have had you done? —keep a duenna to guard her!—cry your mercy, she had one, though, I confess, not sufficiently vigilant, for she was engaged in her own affairs;—or did he wish you, now the mischief is done, to set off, like another Quixote, in search of the ravisher, and rescue the damsel? Nay, never look serious—have I not equal cause, when I have lost my dear spouse, yet bear it with patience? Why did you not answer your brother in the scriptural language he is accustomed to, making

making *free* with the words of Cain—'Am I my sister's keeper?"

"Damnation, madam!" replied Edwin, "you go too far!" then throwing himself on a sofa, he muttered between his closed teeth—"I am indeed Cain, cursed of God and man."

Edwin's compunction was, however, far from being permanent; before the night closed, the company of Mrs. Whitmore had greatly alleviated it, though reflection, when he was alone, returned with redoubled poignancy. He certainly did not love her; but she was a voluptuary in pleasure, and fascinated his senses at the expence of his reason. Her passions were by nature violent, and, untaught by education to subdue them, they had gained fresh strength by the neglect of Whitmore, whom she had long regarded with indifference, and amused herself as best suited her inclinations; but as, until very lately, she had

had been cautious in her outward conduct, was universally well received. The affair with Darleville had been the most public, probably from his vanity; for she certainly felt no particular affection for him, having dismissed him before the duel took place, expressed no uneasiness when she heard he was wounded, nor pleasure when informed he was out of danger.

While Edwin was endeavouring to dissipate his merited uneasiness, William, as he advanced on his journey, was forming a thousand different plans to lessen the weight of the news he had to communicate to his friends, while his own heart was distracted with grief and vexation. He had made the journey to town on his own horse, but found that unequal to the speed with which he wished to return, and therefore left it to be brought

down by the waggoner, and returned post.



William by this means reached the Forest much sooner than either his father or wife, who knew his real destination, could expect; for Mrs. Godwin and Agnes had no suspicion of the truth. As he advanced towards home, the tidings he had to communicate became so painful, that he slackened his pace; and the pleasure he would otherwise have felt on the idea of embracing his beloved wife, smiling babe, and family, was lost in the agonizing thought, that it should fall to his lot to disclose events, whose effects, he much feared, would have a fatal tendency. It was the close of day when he reached home. Never before had he thought it painful to cross the threshold: he reflected with vexation on the speed he had used on his journey.—"It is," said he, "as if I was in haste to distress them as deeply as myself." He then,
not

not meeting any one, turned his horse into the stable, and with an irresolute step advanced towards the door; when, in the kitchen, he heard Fanny, whose voice was wild music, singing to her infant,

> "There's nae luck about the house,
> There's nae luck at a';
> There's nae luck about the house,
> When our gude man's awa.
>
> "Sae sweet his voice, sae smooth his tongue,
> His breath like cauler air,
> His very tread has music in't,
> As he comes up the stair.
> "There's nae luck," &c.

"Oh, it is too much," exclaimed William. "Inhuman, barbarous monster! for I cannot call him brother who rends asunder such ties, and agonizes those he is bound, by every sentiment of honour and gratitude, to protect. Alas! I have now no brother—no sister! would to Heaven I never had, or that they had died in infancy—innocent and happy!"

 He

He now entered, and found his parents and Fanny seated together: all leaped up to receive him: Fanny depositing her little charge in the cradle, and flying into his arms, Mrs. Godwin unsuspiciously inquiring after Bernard's friend, while Godwin fixed his eyes in silence on the altered and pale face of his son, and already shuddered at the expectation of what he had to repeat.

"———— His brows the title-page,
That speaks the nature of a tragic volume.
— — — — — — —
Thou tremblest, and the whiteness of thy cheek
Is apter than thy tongue to tell thy errand.
E'en such a man, so faint, so spiritless,
So dull, so dead in look, so woe-begone,
Drew Priam's curtain in the dead of night,
And would have told him half his Troy was burnt;
But Priam found the fire ere he his tongue."

William gave an evasive answer to his mother's question, and having returned his wife's caresses, anxiously cast around his

his eyes, and inquired after Bernard and Agnes.

"My father," replied Fanny, "is out, and our dear Agnes has been very indifferent ever since you went away, and is now retired to bed: but how pale you are, William! indeed you are sadly altered—I am sure you are ill. Perhaps you have hurried too much. I did not expect you yet."

Mrs. Godwin expressed the same idea respecting his appearance, while the venerable father remained silent and lost in thought; for William's speedy return without Emma confirmed all his fears. At that instant entered Bernard singing, blithe as a hale constitution and an upright mind could make him.

"What, William!" cried he, "art come, my lad? Nothing but good news, I know. My kinsman is got well, I hope?"

hope?" winking significantly, "and thou art satisfied."

William sighed, and wrung his hands in silence.

"Why, what ails? art tired or sick? —thee lookest quite ill! And what poor horse is't in the stable?—'tis miserable thin, and as weary as a dog: thee used to have more mercy on a dumb beast. I looked in as I came round, and could not think whose half-famished creature it was."

Before William could reply, Mr. Godwin took his wife by the hand, and said—"My beloved friend, we have been married six-and-thirty years, in all which time I never before used deceit; and perhaps it is, even in this instance, unjustifiable. William, my love, has been to London, and I am amazed at his speedy return—he appears ill too. I my-
self

self fear all is not there as we could wish; but we are Christians, and will endeavour to receive the evil as becomes us in this transitory state."

Mrs. Godwin made no reply; maternal tenderness swelled in her bosom, and was too poignant to be relieved by words.

"Speak then, William," continued Godwin; "we are prepared—certainty cannot be more horrible than this suspense."

William, though thus pressed, appeared in no haste to reply; even Bernard's features were marked with alarm; while Fanny, as if William's affection could secure her from sorrow, drew her chair closer to his, and pressed one of his hands between both hers.

"Oh, my father!" at length hesitated

 William,

William, his voice hardly articulate, "pardon your son for being the messenger of tidings which must wound you even more deeply than they have done me. Edwin, anxious for independence and wealth, has——"

"Gained it at the expence of honour and rectitude!" interrupted Godwin.

William's affirmative was a sigh.

"No, no!" exclaimed Mrs. Godwin, hastily, "it is a mistake; you believe too easily—William is misinformed. Edwin is young and lively, and may err, but not grossly."

"Ay, ay," said Bernard, "it is only so: William is so good himself, he cannot make proper allowance for common frailties. I am glad, however, Agnes is not here. He has made a trip, I suppose—some girl, I doubt. Never mind, we must keep it a secret:—but what has that

that to do with wealth and independence?"

"I will not believe it," replied Mrs. Godwin; "he loves Agnes too well to be guilty in the manner you allude to. But where is my Emma—my child—why is she not returned with you? She will next be scandalized—suspected: not the world shall now keep her from her mother."

"Alas! where shall we find her?" cried William, involuntarily.

"Find her!" screamed Mrs. Godwin; "Is she dead?—for living, who shall hide her from me?"

"None but herself, my mother," replied William. "Alas! she is unworthy you—she has fled with a vile betrayer."

A friendly insensibility for some moments deprived the wretched mother of her sense of anguish, and all remained silent; but recovering, by the aid of

Fanny, tears in some measure eased her overcharged heart.—" And what remains, William," said she, " fear not now to speak—the blow is struck. What of Edwin—is he too lost? I charge you, by your love and duty to me, speak. I will know the worst, and pray for patience to support it."

Godwin repeated the command.

William, thus pressed, with the utmost agitation, related all he knew respecting Emma, concluding with the marriage of Edwin to Mrs. Delmer, but suppressing his finding him at Mrs. Whitmore's.

All remained for some time lost in astonishment, until at length Godwin exclaimed—" Cruel, deceitful boy! is this the return for my anxious cares for your happiness? Alas! I feared even to refuse what my heart could not ap-

prove,

prove, and by a false indulgence have undone you. Miserable man that I am, how shall I bear this stroke, or comfort this unhappy sufferer," looking with anguish on his wife, "when I cannot myself support it? Oh, God of mercy!" exclaimed he, raising his clasped hands, "how did I pray for children, and in thy anger thou gavest them!"

Fanny dropped on her knees at his feet—"Oh, my father!" replied she, looking tenderly at William, "all your children are not the gifts of anger."

"No, my daughter," replied the old man; "William and thyself, nay, and my Agnes too, have virtues to overbalance the other's errors, for ye are all mine; and from this hour, if my heart is capable of distinction, Agnes must claim it; for who shall comfort her? William, I doubt not, will endeavour to requite thee, for his love is sincere and worthy its object."

As he spoke, he raised his weeping daughter-in-law, and pressed her to his bosom, while she hung round his neck, and watered his grey hairs with her tears.

"Oh, Bernard!" cried Godwin, "let not this blow divide our friendship—condemn not all for the errors of one."

Bernard held out his hand and grasped that of Godwin, exclaiming, while sorrow almost choked his speech—"Condemn *you!*—may Heaven condemn *me* if I do! No, my heart bleeds for you. Ah, William! thou wast right when thou blamest me for applauding his going to town."

"I will retire," said Mrs. Godwin, rising, but sinking again into her chair; "I am not well, my head is giddy, and my heart is cold. Give me your hand, Fanny, and lead me to bed. Oh, my children!—my children!"

Fanny and William led their unhappy mother to her chamber, where the former

former insisted on attending her for the night, but was refused by Mrs. Godwin.—"No," said she, "you will hereafter, my child, I fear, have to attend your suffering sister; surely she already suspects something, for her health droops daily."

Fanny again pressed to stay.—"Will not my beloved husband be with me?" replied Mrs. Godwin: "we will pray and comfort each other. How often have we passed the hours in exultation over the growing virtues of our children—to-night we will weep their vices!"

Fanny retired, and joined the unhappy father and William, who were devising means how to disclose Edwin's perfidy to Agnes; Godwin at length taking the task on himself. The parties then withdrew to their respective chambers, not to sleep, but to deplore the depravity that had banished happiness from their bosoms, and converted the mansion of peace into a house of mourning.

CHAP-

CHAPTER IV.

In the morning all met at breakfast but Mrs. Godwin, who appeared too much indisposed to leave her bed. Agnes, apparently lost in melancholy, was not, however, insensible to the distress that hung on every face, and with a fearful energy entreated to know the cause.

Godwin at length informed her of Emma's flight, adding, as he concluded, while tears streamed down his venerable cheeks—"But I will endeavour to tear her from my heart: thou, Agnes, shalt supply her place, and become doubly dear to me."

"Oh, my beloved, my unhappy Emma," cried Agnes, weeping, "how sincerely do I feel for you! She has been deceived,

deceived, deluded, and, if she can but be regained, forgive, my father, and receive her to your bosom. Oh, she has a thousand virtues to counterbalance this one error; and will, I hope, behave hereafter in a manner to make even you forget it."

As none seemed willing to continue the discourse, it ceased here, and the breakfast passed in silence, being removed almost untouched, each appearing to shun the eye of the other—even little Reuben's smiles being disregarded.

The visible anxiety that already hung on Agnes made Godwin doubly unwilling to disclose the unhappiness that awaited her, yet he thought it unjustifiable to lengthen her delusion; therefore, after breakfast, being alone with her, began the painful task. As he proceeded, his tenderness redoubled his emotion,

emotion, and he was frequently for some minutes inarticulate.

Agnes's behaviour, on the contrary, was even painfully calm; she shed no tears, vented no reproach, but listened in silence, as one on whom neither joy nor sorrow could any longer make impression.

"Oh, my beloved child!" concluded the old man, "how shall we be able to obliterate from thy memory the unworthiness of the ungrateful Edwin? Yet it shall be my daily prayer to Heaven to effect it, and the constant endeavour of us all, to love thee with redoubled affection, particularly of mine, my child."

"Oh, I am unworthy," exclaimed Agnes, breaking silence, "I am unworthy!—call me not your child—I am vile, abandoned, lost. In an evil hour I forgot virtue, and Heaven has forsaken me!"

"Impossible!"

"Impossible, my love! Distress has impaired thy senses; thou wert ever virtuous as lovely, the delight of the eye, and darling of every heart."

"Ah, no, my more than father!" replied she, falling at his feet, the scalding tears flowing in torrents down her blushing cheeks, and concealing her face on his knees—"I cannot deceive you—you are too good to be deceived: your kindness pierces my heart, and forces me to lay it open to your view; yet do not hate—do not banish me your presence; I cannot bear your displeasure. Though I am not the virtuous Agnes you once knew, do not spurn me—my life will pay the forfeit!"

A gloomy presage seized the mind of Godwin, and transfixed his soul with horror.—"It is impossible," said he; "yet speak, my Agnes—fear me not; Edwin cannot have been such a villain! he could not sure attempt thy innocence?"

Agnes for a moment made no reply; at

at length exclaimed—" Oh, my father! Edwin is not more guilty than the abandoned Agnes!"

Godwin gave a cry of surprise and mingled horror—resignation and patience appeared totally to have forsaken him. In speechless agony he threw himself on the floor, and tore from his head its venerable honours.

The affrighted family heard the noise, and rushing in, found him on the ground, Agnes, trembling and ready to faint, endeavouring to raise him.

" Oh, my father!" cried Fanny, " why are you thus?—you will alarm my mother. Alas! I fear she is already convulsed."

" May the villain who occasioned it be accursed!" replied he, with vehemence, despair in his voice, and his features distorted with anguish.

" Ah!

"Ah! *whom* do you curse, my father?" exclaimed Agnes; "recall, recall the cruel words—Edwin cannot exist under a parent's malediction."

"It has involuntarily passed my lips," replied Godwin; "I cannot recall it. Merciful God! and have I lived to curse my son? But give me your arm, my child—lead me to my wife—I am sick with sorrow—we will die together."

William and Fanny raised their father, and led him to his wife's apartment, Fanny remaining to attend her mother, while William, who had no suspicion of the last intelligence his father had received, returned to Agnes, whom he endeavoured, by every means in his power, to console; and perceiving that his father having cursed Edwin hung on her spirits, endeavoured to remove the impression.

"I am equally displeased as my father,"

ther," said William; "but I cannot curse, nor yet hate him, though I despise him beyond the power of words to express. Nay, weep not—Agnes, he is unworthy your tears; he merits only your disdain, as he has mine."

"Why will you speak thus?" cried Agnes; "why recall a scene I have frequently endeavoured to obliterate from my memory? Unhappy Edwin! would to Heaven thou hadst not sworn so rashly! yet I trust thou art not *abandoned* of God, though, alas! thou art *cursed* by thy father, *despised* by thy brother, and by thy Agnes—*forgiven*."

William knew not that she alluded to the curse Edwin had called on his own head, should he break his vows, and still continued endeavouring to sooth her, when a cry of sorrow struck on their ears, and banished every other idea. Both flew in haste to Mrs. Godwin's apartment, where a sight presented that

at

at once struck them with grief and horror: she was struggling in a violent convulsion that had just seized her; the terrified Fanny, with the servant, endeavouring to succour her, while Godwin, in speechless agony, was on his knees by her side.

William remained in the apartment but a moment; then hasted away, and mounting his horse, rode off full speed for the nearest medical help, with whom he returned in little more than an hour. Mrs. Godwin was still in the same situation; and though at length in some degree recovered, yet was so weakened and low, that the assistance they called in pronounced her recovery very doubtful; the shock she had received from the conduct of her children had impaired her understanding, and her constant dwelling on their names shewed the impression still remained, in spite of agony and even delirium. For three days little alteration

teration appeared, the unhappy family fluctuating between hope and despair; and, to add to their sorrow, Agnes, though she forced herself to attend on Mrs. Godwin, yet it was plainly perceptible that she was not equal to the effort. At this period the convulsive spasms increased: and, in two days more, the unhappy mother became at once both speechless and insensible, and was declared past all hope. Who, at that fearful hour, can paint the agonies of the afflicted family? Edwin and Emma were forgotten in the greater sorrow, or only at periods remembered as the cause of all. On the bed, supported by pillows, and the arms of a husband whose affection had increased with growing years, sat Mrs. Godwin, placidity on every feature, her half-extinguished eye raised alternately with confident hope, or turned with soft compassion on her weeping family. On his knees, on one side, was William; on the other,

Fanny

Fanny and Agnes; at the feet, Bernard; and at some distance, the old servant, who had lived with them ever since their marriage, nursing Reuben, and bathing his face with her tears. Mrs. Godwin beckoned her to approach, and taking the hand of Margery, put it into that of Fanny, as though she commended them to each other.

"I understand you, my mother," said Fanny; "I will regard the happiness of Margery as one of your last commands, and hold it sacred; she is too old to labour—Reuben shall henceforward be her only care."

Mrs. Godwin bowed her assent, and drawing Reuben close to her, kissed his smiling mouth, and, by her raised eye, appeared to ask a blessing on him; then holding a hand to each alternately, she saluted all—Bernard, as he received this last token of her friendship and affec-

tion,

tion, sobbing aloud, and wringing his hands in agony. His emotion distressed her—she endeavoured to speak, but the effort was fruitless, and only brought on a fresh convulsion, in which she struggled for some moments, but at length recovered, though with increased weakness and additional symptoms of approaching dissolution: her speech too, though almost inarticulate, was returned. —"Bless ye, bless ye, my good, my dutiful children!—forgive, pray for your deluded brother and sister. Agnes, be comforted: Edwin is most to be pitied, for you are virtuous—he is——" Then turning to Godwin—"Friend, husband, companion, be comforted; we shall meet again." As she spoke she extended her arms, and was received into his, where, after remaining some minutes, apparently in silent prayer, she bowed her face, and articulately said—"From these arms, which have led me in innocence and peace, oh, receive thy servant! Blessed!

ed!—blessed!——" her voice failed, respiration grew weaker, and in a few minutes she expired on his bosom.

"And art thou gone for ever!" said Godwin, after a long pause, at the same time laying his wife's head on the pillow, and fixing his eyes upon her lifeless face—"am I indeed left to weep thy loss, to mourn thy untimely death! Devoted children, how will ye hereafter answer this? Edwin, thou hast gained wealth, but lost thine own soul!"

William and the family were unequal to the task of administering comfort, and stood around weeping in silent anguish.

"But shall I selfishly repine, blessed saint?" resumed the old man, kissing her hand. "Forbid it, Heaven! thy cares are past, and thy reward prepared. Be comforted then, my children, and bless the Power that spared her thus long. Methinks she smiles upon us. Let us

 kneel

kneel around her—our prayers will ascend to the Throne of Mercy, where we have now a blessed mediatrix."

The family obeyed; the old man prayed long and fervently, until at length that resignation which true piety ever inspires, calmed the acuteness of their feelings, and left them able to perform the last attentions which duty demanded for the honoured clay.

CHAP-

CHAPTER V.



WHILE sorrow and death had been busy at Inglewood, Edwin, who carried a vulture in his own bosom, which, in spite of all his efforts, he could neither silence nor destroy, was endeavouring to forget reflection by plunging yet deeper and deeper in error. His wife, who had raised him to what he once thought the pinnacle of happiness, was neglected, and almost abhorred, for being the means of placing an insuperable bar between him and Agnes; while the lascivious and wanton Mrs. Whitmore, with whom he spent the greater part of his time, was caressed, not from affection, but because she possessed all the art of intoxicating the passions, though at the expence of reason and judgment. The idea of Ag-

nes was, however, a constant intruder; he reflected with horror on the agonies he supposed she suffered, nor was he more easy on account of his family: in spite of vice and folly, he loved them, and his wealth lost half its charms, as they could not share it.

Eager to find excuses to his own conscience for his conduct, he regarded Whitmore as the cause of all, and determined, should he ever meet him, to take a full revenge. In the mean time, getting Agnes into his power was his constant determination, though he could not as yet devise by what means. At first he expected to meet her anger and resentment, but had no doubt that he should be able to calm the storm, especially as he had so strong an advocate in her own heart.

Edwin, as soon as his marriage was acknowledged, had hired a servant particularly

larly to attend him—a shrewd and intelligent fellow, one whom he thought he could venture to trust on such an occasion; he therefore disclosed such part of the business as was necessary for his purpose, and that could be unfolded with honour to himself; and determined to send him disguised to Inglewood, to endeavour at least to inquire into the health of the family; if possible, to speak to Agnes and declare his business, which was to entreat her to form no decided opinion of Edwin's conduct until she saw him, as he had been grossly misrepresented, and could not vindicate himself from the imputation but by a personal interview.

This message was to be delivered verbally, as Edwin feared that should he write, it might be produced as fresh evidence of duplicity against him; while, in the first case, there was no danger, as

 he

he could easily, on occasion, forswear both the message and messenger.

Thus determined, accompanied only by his servant, he departed, and reached a small village at about fifteen miles distance from Inglewood, where he remained, while his servant repaired alone to the Forest; from whence he did not return until the second day.

Edwin had waited for him with impatience; and so numerous were his questions, that the man knew not how to reply, but entreated his master to suffer him to relate the whole methodically.

"It was," said Harris, "near four in the afternoon before I got there. I meant to remain in the vicinity until the evening, then, as I was on foot, pretend to be benighted, and inquire at your

your father's my way to the next market-town; never doubting but they would have humanity sufficient at least to offer me some refreshment, if not a lodging for the night, as I had all my story ready, and thought in that case I should find an opportunity to deliver my message. As it was far too early to appear, I kept walking about at some distance, fearful of being noticed, and at length came to a little church, and for a while passed my time in reading the grave-stones until the bell began to toll; and I saw numbers of people coming from all sides, and thronging the church-yard. As I had plenty of time, I thought I might as well stay and be a spectator; not doubting but it was the funeral of some nobleman, and much beloved, as almost every one wept."

"Damn your funeral! come to the point; they have lost their paragon, I suppose. I have forgotten her name, though I heard her praises sufficiently

sounded while I was at Inglewood; but my mind was too much engrossed with Agnes to think of aught else."

"It was not the person you allude to," replied the man, in a voice that alarmed Edwin; "the loss concerns you more nearly."

"Distraction!" exclaimed Edwin, starting from the chair, a cold sweat bedewing his forehead, and his knees knocking against each other.—"Say not it is Agnes, unless you would lay me dead before you."

"It was your mother's funeral," replied Harris: "I saw her laid in the earth."

"And art thou gone, mildest, best of women?" exclaimed Edwin, weeping bitterly, regardless of his servant. "Any vexation I may have given her, surely could not be violent enough to occasion her death. Emma's conduct must have wounded her far more deeply. She was in years too—near sixty, I think, yet hearty,

hearty, and apparently likely to live much longer."

Thus did he industriously endeavour to exculpate himself from any share in his mother's death; and finding the uncertainty respecting the rest of his family painful, strove to calm his agitation, and ordered Harris to continue his narrative from where he had left off, without the least reserve.

"Well then, sir," said Harris, "I mingled with the crowd, and inquired what great personage was to be buried, that caused, in such a scattered neighbourhood, so great a number of people to assemble?

'It is neither lord nor lady,' replied an old man, 'but the wife of an industrious farmer, who was born and has ever dwelt among us, easy in his circumstances, and universally beloved and respected, as you may judge by the people

assembled at the funeral. Ah! well,' continued the old man, 'do I remember their marriage—he was the son of our rector, and she the daughter of a neighbouring farmer; she might have matched higher, but Godwin alone was her choice, and truly a worthy one; for the longer they lived together, the more they appeared to love one another.'

'And what children have they?' said I, carelessly, thinking the question might lead to some other respecting Mr. Bernard's family.

'Two sons and a daughter,' replied he, 'fine grown handsome young folks; the eldest is married, and accounted one of the best men, as well as farmers, in the county; every thing thrives with him, and every body loves him, and that is a bold word.'

'And the other two,' said I.

'Are of late become Londoners,' replied he, 'more's the pity; but I know little of them—they went out of the

country

country worthy their parents, and, I trust, will come back the same.'

"Our discourse was here interrupted by the approach of the funeral; the corpse was carried into the church, a sermon preached, and a psalm sung by those whose tears would permit them to sing. On bearing out the body I observed the mourners, and asked my communicative friend (whom I kept close to) their names.

'The first,' says he, 'is Mr. Godwin, supported by his son. How the youth weeps, while the father's eyes are raised in anguish to heaven! God give them comfort!—he alone can! The next is farmer Bernard, and his daughter, an excellent girl, and as handsome as good; not a tongue but blesses her.' He then mentioned the names of several others, all relations or neighbours, and among them an old grey-headed woman-servant, who, he said, 'had

 lived

lived with them six or seven-and-thirty years.'

"I will not pain you, sir, by endeavouring to describe the cry of distress which was uttered by every one of the unhappy family on the body being laid in the grave, each endeavouring to sustain the other, though unable to support themselves. At length, all being concluded, the people began to separate, and the sorrowful party retook their way homeward, the old man who had been so communicative joining one of the mourners, and accompanying them—a circumstance that greatly disappointed me, as I wished much to question him further. The night was dark and rainy, and I ventured to walk several times round the house, where, however, I heard so many voices, that I relinquished my first purpose of pretending to be benighted, lest I should meet among them the old man I had conversed with; besides,

besides, from the badness of the weather, I had no doubt many would stay all night. I therefore proceeded about four miles, where, at a little alehouse, I procured a bed, and early next morning measured my steps back, walking carelessly at a distance from the house, which three horsemen were just leaving, and passed me on the full gallop. Soon after I saw your father, with Mr. Bernard and your brother, whom I instantly recollected, come out, and take the road to the church. I determined not to lose this opportunity, and walked up to the house, where, to my good fortune, on tapping at the door, it was opened by the beautiful girl I saw at the funeral, and whom I instantly knew again. Oh, sir! you will forgive my being the messenger of such ill tidings, as I have succeeded in my errand. She was alone; I therefore declared my business, which, when she had heard, she withdrew, desiring me to stay, as she would write an answer."

"Charming

"Charming angel!—and how dared you keep me thus in suspense? By Heaven, I will never forgive it! Haste—haste—why did you not begin by delivering it?"

"I kept it to make my peace after my bad news," replied Harris, with the freedom of a servant deeply in the confidence of his master's unworthy secrets, "and hope it will fully answer your expectations."

Edwin received it with a trembling hand, tore it open, and read as follows:

"INHUMAN EDWIN!

"Was it not enough that but yesternight your mother was laid in the earth, but you must seek to redouble the blow, and pursue the devoted Agnes to the brink of the grave!... Oh, before it is too late, repent of the death of your mother;

ther; and soon that of Agnes will plunge you in guilt beyond all hopes of pardon. With the riches you have so dearly obtained, if possible, be happy, and by numerous good actions endeavour to obliterate your past errors; respect the woman that has bestowed them, nor seek to injure her peace or ours, by insulting those you are bound to honour; for every affront offered to Agnes your father and brother will look on as their own.

" As for your pander, I have left him in his mistake—he thinks me Agnes. Alas! I have not words to throw away on such wretches, but would advise you, for his own sake, to send him no more, as the husband of Mrs. Delmer can have no correspondence with Agnes; and I shall not fail to declare his errand to your father and brother. Farewell, Edwin: review your actions and their consequences, then can you not fail to repent;

pent; and your mother will not have died in vain.

"F. GODWIN."

"Hell and destruction!" exclaimed Edwin, "you have mistaken my brother's wife for Agnes! the letter is from her, and my father will be doubly incensed against me. Fool—dolt that I was, to trust you! How could you mistake, when the direction I gave you was so plain?"

"If there is any mistake, it cannot be my fault," replied Harris. "Did you not, sir, tell me a fine-formed elegant girl, remarkably handsome, about nineteen, with blue eyes, and auburn hair falling in ringlets down her face? Besides, sir, did not the old fellow tell me she was Bernard's daughter? Surely, after all, I could not be mistaken."

"You

"You were—you were," cried Edwin, impatiently; "Fanny is the model of her sister, though not so lovely. Oh, you have ruined me beyond all hope! But tell me—relate the whole infernal story of what you saw and heard in the house."

"Why, sir, on my knocking at the door, that handsome girl, whom you say I mistook, opened it: I asked if her name was Bernard? She bowed slightly, and replied, viewing me with curiosity as I thought—'My father's name is Bernard.' Now, sir, you may recollect, that though you told me your brother was married, you did not say to a daughter of Mr. Bernard; how, therefore, should I suspect it? I then opened the business, declaring how unhappy you were, how greatly you had been misrepresented to her, and finally, entreating her to give you an opportunity to exculpate yourself. She heard me through with tolerable patience, though

I now

I now recollect she bit her lip, which, at the moment, I thought no very good symptom; but when I concluded, as she replied—'I have nothing to say to *you*, but will write my answer to your employer,' I thought all was well, and waited accordingly. While she was absent, I cannot say but I was under some apprehension lest your father or brother should return and suspect my business; and egad, sir, I should not much like a controversy with the latter, for he seems a powerful man, and one that don't look as if he would be trifled with. From the former my heels might have saved me; but against your brother, I am conscious none of my efforts would have availed."

"Cease your digressions—what care I for your fears or his prowess!" cried Edwin, impatiently.

"Sir, I have just done.—She soon came down with the letter, and said—'Take this, and give it to your master; but

but beware how you come any more here: next time you may not escape so well.'

"I protest, sir, I thought she meant kindly, and thanked her accordingly; for if she meant otherwise, and her voice is such music when she chides, what must it be when she is pleased? Her eyes, to be sure, were red and swelled with weeping, and she spoke particularly serious; but that I attributed to her recent loss."

"Enough, enough!" exclaimed Edwin—"I will hear no more! Begone—I will call when I want you.—Totally ruined with my father!" resumed he, mournfully, "detested by my brother—my mother dead, and her death laid to me!—that of Agnes too, her raven-like sister has predicted:—distraction is in the thought—that alone is wanting to complete my crimes, my misery!—at least, it should be the signal for their conclusion," continued he, looking at his pistols,

pistols, which were hung up in the apartment, "for I have not plunged thus far in guilt to live without her."

Edwin could not be long absent from his regiment, nor yet could he resolve to live in continual uncertainty respecting Agnes; he therefore at length came to a determination to leave Harris in the country, to send him constant intelligence, which he determined to obtain by the means of the landlord where they then were; Edwin telling him he was Godwin's son, under some displeasure with his father, and on that account particularly unhappy, and interested to hear constantly of his family.

Old Godwin, though not personally known to the host, was too much respected for his name to be a stranger; he therefore lamented that there should be a difference between him and his son, especially as Edwin's appearance and behaviour

haviour much delighted him, wondering within himself how the former could be displeased with so fine a gentleman, whom the servant assured him had a very handsome fortune; all which finally operated with him to promise he would procure the wished-for intelligence, and keep the whole a secret, as particularly recommended him.

Accordingly the farmers who were continually passing to Inglewood, or returning, were questioned respecting the Godwins, who were so generally known and beloved, that every material occurrence respecting their health or welfare usually transpired; the recent death of Mrs. Godwin furnishing a pretence for the landlord's inquiries.

The whole family, they informed him, were said to be in the deepest affliction, not only for the loss of Mrs. Godwin, but for the present unhappy state of

Bernard's

Bernard's youngest daughter, Agnes, who was seized, on the death of Mrs. Godwin, with a delirious fever, which had increased to so great a height that her life was despaired of.

With this intelligence Edwin was forced to set off for London, not being able to procure any more satisfactory; leaving, however, strict charge with his servant to write by every post.

CHAP.

CHAPTER VI.

THE intelligence of the farmers respecting the Godwin family was strictly true. Agnes's spirit, exerted to the uttermost, had supported her until the death of Mrs. Godwin; but that blow, added to the preceding distress, was more than her nature could sustain, and a fever and delirium the almost immediate consequence. Her cruel seduction by Edwin she had alone revealed to his father, who had not the heart to disclose it to any one, though the secret preyed on his vitals, and redoubled his sorrow. He was continually by her side, praying with her, administering her medicines, or endeavouring to calm her frenzy; every exclamation she uttered adding an additional

ditional pang, as they usually respected Edwin and her own happiness.

At the beginning of her illness, the ring she had received from Edwin she had put upon her finger, saying she was his wife—an asseveration no one would deny, the least contradiction making her outrageous.

For two months her life was declared in the utmost danger, and for a considerable time longer continued in a very precarious state; but at length the fever gradually decreased, though the effects still remained, her understanding having received a shock the more alarming, as, though her bodily strength slowly returned, her mental faculties remained equally deranged, though more calm, her ideas still dwelling on her faithless lover, and usually concluding every subject with—"*I am Edwin's wife.*"

Mrs.

Mrs. Palmer, who had been absent from Inglewood, returned at this period, and was both grieved and shocked at the distress her favourite family had experienced, though she knew not to what extent. Eager to endeavour to alleviate their woes, she immediately hastened to them, and did not refuse a friendly tear at the alteration that had taken place in so short a time; her eye, whichever way she turned, that was wont to meet placidity and happiness, now how changed! Mrs. Godwin's seat was vacant—Godwin much thinner, and his form, which was used to be perfectly upright, bent forward, with the appearance of an added twenty years, and his fixed eyes constantly on the ground—Bernard with his arms across, his head sunk on his bosom, his jollity fled, his pipe neglected in the chimney corner, and his jug empty on the shelf—William endeavouring to conceal his distress, fearful of increasing that of his father and wife, while the

sighs that frequently escaped him, and the looks with which he viewed them, bespoke the acuteness of his feelings—the once cheerful and lively Fanny, pale and melancholy—while Agnes, unconcerned at all, sat in a corner amusing herself with trifles; a faint flush spread over her cheeks, the mild lustre of her soft blue eyes changed to a dazzling, but less pleasing brightness, and perpetually cast around, as in search of some object, which failing to meet, they usually fell on the ring upon her finger, with a sigh, and—"*I am Edwin's wife.*" In short, little Reuben was the only one who smiled; he appeared to thrive in calamity, laughing while his mother wept, seizing his grandfather's buttons, or sometimes his grey hairs, until he had forced him to notice him, and for a moment beguiled him of his sorrow.

Mrs. Palmer appeared particularly interested for Agnes, and that with such

sympathizing

sympathizing tenderness, that she became more estimable than ever; they saw her compassion, as well as curiosity, was not a little excited by the constant allusion to Edwin and the ring. She had frequently heard the family say they were affianced to each other, but no word of inquiry escaped her; she only endeavouring to sooth and prevent the attention of Agnes being too much fixed on one object.

"My dear child!" said Godwin, addressing Fanny, "my brother Bernard, William, and myself, are going out for a short space; our good and condescending friend will excuse us: in our absence open your whole heart to her, spare not my unworthy son, nor yet more unhappy daughter; a female friend of her judgment will not only be a comfort to you, but a blessing to us all, for she will not deny her advice where she has not refused a tear."

When Godwin ceased speaking, Mrs.

Palmer arose from the side of Agnes, and taking his hand, replied—" Believe me, my good friend, not only my advice, but any thing else in my power, is entirely at your service in this unhappy juncture, which, I hope, will however terminate happily, and more speedily than you expect. The derangement of Agnes I regard as merely the effect of fever; and that once totally removed, the other will naturally cease.

Godwin bowed, repeated his thanks, and accompanied by Bernard, left her alone with Fanny and Agnes.

Fanny was too much distressed to be in haste to obey her father-in-law, and was likewise restrained by the presence of Agnes; but on her retiring to rest, with few words, but many tears, she related all that had passed, the goodness of her own heart prompting her to palliate the whole as much as truth would allow.

As

As she concluded, Mrs. Palmer embraced her, saying—"Fear not, my amiable girl, your duty and sisterly affection will meet its reward; the present trials are severe, but will, I hope, be succeeded by a calm. In the mean time, regard me as your friend, mother, sister, or any title that best accords with your own heart. I, alas! Fanny, though enjoying wealth even more than I wish, have room for all those claims, as I am literally (though possessed of relations) alone in the world, my dearest connexions being torn asunder."

Fanny pressed the hand of Mrs. Palmer to her lips, and bathed it with her tears.—"Oh! how truly, madam, did my father speak, when he said you would comfort me! Alas!" said she, hesitating, "I have secrets that I cannot reveal to men, however dear."

"If necessary to disclose them, my dear girl," replied Mrs. Palmer, "fear not to trust to my prudence; yourself

shall only withdraw them from my bosom."

Fanny wept, and seemed irresolute; but the kind assurances of Mrs. Palmer at length, in some measure, reassuring her, with tears and glowing blushes she owned that she had a fear on her sister's account that overwhelmed her with shame and confusion; in fine, that during the latter part of her illness she could not avoid perceiving an alteration in her shape, which but too truly corroborated what she revealed in her frenzy, frequently speaking of an oath, and ever at the time viewing a ring (which was a diamond, set in the shape of a heart, and surrounded with rubies and brilliants alternately), repeating her favourite adage—"*I am Edwin's wife.*"

Mrs. Palmer, though shocked at this intelligence, endeavoured all in her power to console her young friend, representing

presenting it was very possible she might be mistaken in her surmises; but if not, thought the unhappy Agnes so greatly to be pitied, that she would devise means (if she survived) to conceal the misfortune from the world.

Fanny could not speak her thanks, but threw herself at Mrs. Palmer's feet, expressing her gratitude in a language far more emphatic than words.

Mr. Godwin and his companions, on their return, were pleased to find Fanny more composed than usual, and returned a thousand thanks to Mrs. Palmer, who, however, delighted more in doing a good action than hearing it acknowledged, and cut them short, by saying —" You will fright me from my purpose of visiting you daily if you treat me thus."

Mrs. Palmer was true to her word;

not a day passed but she called at the farm, and by her kindness and attention alleviated the sorrows of all but Godwin, who, though he felt her kindness, could not forget the ingratitude of his children, whose conduct, like a corroding poison, was continually preying deeper on his heart.

Mrs. Palmer, with the characteristic goodness that peculiarly distinguished her, on being informed by Fanny of Emma's flight, and that if William could have discovered her route, he would have pursued her, wrote to several correspondents she had abroad, requesting them privately to inquire after Whitmore, and, if possible, send her information. The only account she gained was from Paris, where she learnt he had remained a month, and that he had a lady with him, remarkably handsome, who was said not to be his wife, but apparently happy in her situation; that he went

went from thence privately, and it was uncertain what route he had taken. As this account contained nothing satisfactory, Mrs. Palmer communicated it alone to William, who could only thank her for the interest she took in their affairs.

The health of Agnes, in the mean time, continued in the same precarious state. An eminent physician who had been consulted, advised a perseverance in their own lenient methods, together with music, exercise, and conversation; by pursuing which means, he entertained no doubt but time would restore her reason; but had far more fear for her health, which he pronounced had consumptive symptoms, very alarming at her age. Her situation, which confirmed all Fanny's fears, became weekly more conspicuous, though unsuspected by any of the male part of the family, until unable to conceal it much longer,

 Mrs.

Mrs. Palmer persuaded Fanny to suffer her to disclose it—a step she thought the more necessary, as Fanny herself was pregnant, and in such perpetual anxiety respecting her sister's situation, that it materially injured her health. Godwin and William received this intelligence like a fresh stroke of thunder—Bernard, the big tears chasing each other down his own cheeks, in vain endeavouring to speak comfort to them.

Mrs. Palmer proposed that Agnes should be moved to a house of hers on the borders of Yorkshire, where she had a person she could safely trust; and that Fanny might accompany her, with any other of the family they thought proper. This generous offer was, after some consultation, accepted, but delayed as unnecessary for two months at least. Mrs. Palmer, in the mean time, as if the good of her fellow-creatures was her nearest concern, was constant in her visits to the

the farm, where she had caused a harpsichord to be brought—an instrument on which she was an adept, and played to Agnes daily. At first she tried sprightly music, but it appeared to increase her derangement, and was therefore immediately changed for the penseroso, which had a more happy effect, attracting her attention, and calling forth her tears. This success encouraged Mrs. Palmer to continue; and one day, after having played Pope's Ode of *Vital spark of heavenly flame*, and accompanied it with her voice, Agnes, for the first time since Mrs. Godwin's death, appeared to recollect her, and starting up, holding her hand to her forehead, she said—"I will go to my mother's grave, for *I am Edwin's wife.*"

Mrs. Palmer desired she might be gratified, and sending for her carriage, Agnes was lifted in, and accompanied by Fanny and her generous friend.

When they arrived at the churchyard, leaning on Fanny's arm, she walked to the grave, and sitting upon the ground, kissed the sod that covered it, saying—"Ah! my dear mother, I am ill, very ill, but do not forget you, though you are in heaven, for *I am Edwin's wife.* I will bring flowers and set them here," continued she—"flowers for summer, autumn, winter, and spring; nought but flowers should cover her grave; and who so proper to plant them as me, for *I am Edwin's wife?*"

Fanny wept bitterly, and though Agnes had never before paid any attention to her tears, she now noticed them. —"Why do you weep, Fanny?" said she. "If it makes you uneasy, you may plant the flowers for spring and summer yourself, for you are William's wife, and your heart is warm. I will set those for autumn and winter, for my heart is cold—*I am Edwin's wife.*"

"Oh! I cannot—cannot bear it!" cried

cried Fanny. "Inhuman—barbarous—degenerate monster!"

"Of whom do you speak, Fanny?" replied Agnes; "not of Edwin, I hope, though now I remember," continued she, pausing for some minutes, as if endeavouring to recollect herself, "his father cursed him, and his brother despised him; I, however, forgave him, so you may all do as you please, though it does not become me to hear it, for *I am Edwin's wife.*"

Mrs. Palmer, who perceived the effect this scene had upon Fanny, by gentle means drew Agnes from the grave; and placing her with her sister in the coach, returned home with them.

From this time Agnes went daily to the churchyard, usually accompanied by her brother or Margery; for the whole family had joined commands to

entreat

entreat Fanny to keep from attending her thither.

During the first two months of Agnes's illness, Edwin's servant had remained at the inn, procuring intelligence by various means; but after that period, being assured by the country people it was a regular insanity, which they attributed to her lover being false-hearted (though her situation was a profound secret), he returned to his master, leaving it to the landlord to give them information by letter from time to time; and which he did not fail, as he was quite of his wife's opinion, that captain Godwin (as she called him) was a very handsome man, and as generous as handsome.

In this state passed the time for near seven months after Mrs. Godwin's death, when Edwin received a letter from his

correspondent

correspondent in the country to this purport:—

"HONOURED SIR,

"I think fit to inform you, that three days ago farmer Bernard's two daughters left the Forest in a postchaise, attended only by an old black servant, whom I never saw before. As our house is the first stage from Inglewood upwards, they changed horses, but never got out of the chaise; nor should I have known them but for the postboy, who informed me who they were. As the black came into the house, I thought he might have given me an answer like a Christian servant, and therefore asked him to take a glass, which, as he accepted, I said (not pretending to know them) 'You are going to London, I presume?' —To which he replied—'No.'—'Cross country?'—'No.'—'To the races, mayhap?'—'No;' and throwing down the money

money for his liquor, mounted his horse, and followed the chaise like a pagan as he was. I am sure, sir, you will allow with me, that it is a wicked sin to prefer such blackamore heathens to good white servants, who know how to give a civil answer; but, as my wife says, it is all owing to their want of education, for they run wild before they are taken and tamed by us Christians, and know no religion but what their own foolish nature prompts; nor have any laws to restrain them, which, however, don't much signify, as they have no property to secure; but would make sad work in a Christian nation, where people know right from wrong, and act accordingly. But all this, good sir, is from the purpose; I was willing to oblige you, and so by the postboys traced them two stages, where they were met by a plain chaise and pair, in which they continued their journey, but I know not whither.

"I have no more to add, but my best wishes

wishes for your welfare, and thanks for your kindness, and remain

"Your obliged humble servant,

"JEREMIAH JENKINS."

This intelligence added curiosity to the other unpleasing sensations which possessed Edwin. Where could Fanny and her sister be going, while the health of the latter was in so precarious a state? Their attendant too, what could he be? He appeared bound to secrecy, and equal to the trust. In short, the more he ruminated, the more he was perplexed, and at length came to a determination to entreat leave of absence, and endeavour to develop the mystery himself. The death of his mother, nor the subsequent illness of Agnes, had not been able to awaken him to a proper sense of his errors; he felt, but it was a momentary sensation; for, scared at the very idea of reflection, he fled to dissipation,

pation, and soon obliterated, or at least protracted, the pangs of retrospection, by debauchery, luxury, or gaming, neglected his wife, and added ingratitude to the catalogue of his crimes. Mrs. Godwin, whose only incentive to marriage with Edwin was love, had alternately recourse to tears, entreaties, reproaches, and anger; but equally vain, he fled from all; home he thought hell, and his wife the fiend commissioned to torment him; while he had constant recourse to the sprightly, wanton Mrs. Whitmore, who laughed at his scruples, and gave occasion for fresh ones: yet Agnes was still dear to him; and he would willingly have relinquished all he possessed to have been reinstated at Inglewood, as he was before his acquaintance with Whitmore.

CHAP.

CHAPTER VII.



WHEN Agnes was supposed to be about seven months advanced in her pregnancy, accompanied by her sister, she was moved to a small house near Richmond, that appertained to Mrs. Palmer, but in which she had lately settled the widow of a sea-officer, who had been left in indifferent circumstances. Here Fanny and Agnes were received with true tenderness and respect, Mrs. Palmer having prepared Mrs. Smith, the lady of the house, for their reception; and also sent them attended by her favourite domestic, Felix, the negro, mentioned by Mr. Jeremiah Jenkins. The separation was painful to the whole family, though allowed by all as the most prudent plan to conceal the unhappy situation

situation of Agnes, whose intellects, though rather more settled, were yet far from right; and, to their further uneasiness, her bodily strength apparently weakened as her mind recovered its vigour. Mr. Godwin's health, too, daily declined since the death of his wife, and the effects of the misery that continually preyed on him seemed hastening to a crisis.

The change from Inglewood to Richmond, after some little time, appeared to have a happy effect on the senses of Agnes; she frequently inquired for her father, William, and particularly Mr. Godwin, pressing Fanny to let her return to him, in a manner that pierced her heart; she apparently too began to be sensible of her situation, and frequently wept for hours.

William, who had not attended them on the journey, joined them soon after

with his father; and after some stay, returned to the Forest, leaving Mr. Godwin behind, as Agnes appeared rejoiced to see him, and so greatly distressed when they spoke of his departure, that he determined to remain and await the event.

About a month before the delivery of Agnes, her senses became perfectly collected; but that event, which they had so earnestly desired, served but to increase their sorrow; her self-reproaches were continual, and the kindness of her friends apparently increased her distress; thankful for their constant attention, but ever declaring, that though they forgave her, she should never forgive herself. Fanny was likewise advanced, though not so forward, in her pregnancy; and the fatigue and uneasiness she had undergone on account of her sister had greatly impaired her health, though she carefully endeavoured to conceal it,

lest

lest it should increase the general uneasiness.

Mrs. Palmer, before they had been moved a month to Richmond, came to see them; her general philanthropy easily accounted to her domestics for her conduct to the sisters, the only one of them who had any knowledge of the real situation of Agnes being Felix, whose attendance Mrs. Palmer had judged necessary, as Mrs. Smith kept but one female servant; and it was thought most prudent, at the present period, not to increase the number. The chaise in which Mrs. Palmer travelled was the same that had met and conveyed Fanny and Agnes to Richmond; at which time the latter was so wrapped up in a long cloak, that her shape was by no means discernible, had the man who drove the vehicle been even curiously inclined, which was far from the case; for he had long resided with his mistress,

tress, was satisfied implicitly to follow her commands without question, and loved her better than any other object, except his horses. On her arrival at Richmond, not choosing more inmates than absolutely necessary, she had sent this servant with her carriage to an inn, Felix going with orders when any were given: thus there was no apparent secrecy affected in the retreat of Agnes, Mrs. Palmer simply saying among her own people, that she was moved to try the change of air. Felix had replied to Jenkins in the manner he did, merely because he conceived his questions impertinent; for to every other person who inquired, Bernard and William, by agreement, answered truly, that the sisters were at a house of Mrs. Palmer's, in Yorkshire, though without signifying the immediate spot.—Mrs. Palmer, in the kindest manner, endeavoured to cheer the depressed spirits of Agnes; and having no musical instrument, strove

to

to divert her attention by various relations, some amusing, others melancholy; and observing that she sometimes appeared to regard Felix with an emotion of fear, said to her one day, with a smile, when he was absent—"My dear girl, I think I can tell you a story that will make you forget Felix's colour, or at least reconcile you to it; besides, it will pass the time this long evening, and banish more painful thoughts."

Agnes bowed; all subjects were immaterial to her but that nearest to her heart; while Fanny, glad of any attempt to divert her sister's melancholy, returned thanks for Mrs. Palmer's condescension; as did also Godwin, who declared he was totally regardless of the complexion of Felix when he conversed with him, as he appeared at once well-informed, and possessed of a good heart.

"Well then," said Mrs. Palmer, taking

taking her seat between Godwin and Agnes, "I will simply relate to you the events of my own weary pilgrimage —Felix has some share in them; nor am I the only one of my family on whom he has conferred obligations; but the occurrences before I knew him will be best related by himself.

"I am the only daughter of an affluent merchant, called Sommerton; my grandfather, by the mother's side, possessed a considerable estate in Jamaica, and had only a son and daughter; the younger of whom, my mother, was educated in England, and by that means, in all probability, her life was saved, for both her parents were killed in an insurrection of the negroes, and from which fate her brother was only preserved by the affection of a slave. My mother, at this unhappy period, was nineteen, and her brother a year older; both were left in the guardianship of a merchant, with whom (as soon as her brother could reach

 England)

England) they took up their residence. The only son of this gentleman, in about a twelvemonth after, married my mother, by whom he had several children, all of whom died in their infancy, except myself, who was the youngest. My uncle, whose name was Walters, in the mean time, disliking an inactive life, and being disgusted with the West Indies, had sold off the greatest part of his possessions there, and commenced merchant; in which profession he was uncommonly successful. From the death of a young lady, to whom he was contracted, he had formed the resolution of remaining a bachelor; and, to divert the melancholy occasioned by his loss, frequently took long voyages, so that he seldom remained in England for any length of time. He was tenderly attached to my mother, who was equally so to him, and myself the darling of both; my uncle, whenever he was at home, loading me with presents,

and

and gratifying my wishes even to profusion.

"In this manner passed my childhood until my fourteenth year, when my uncle departed for India, leaving my father the entire care of his whole property in his absence; and tenderly embracing me before his departure, seeing me weep, he said—'Cheer up, my girl—I am only getting rich for thee;' and pulling out a valuable watch, he presented it to me, adding—'There, let me see how carefully you will preserve this for my sake; and on my return I will change it for one double the value.' He soon after departed, leaving me very melancholy, though, I must confess, my grief was rather lessened at intervals on contemplating the present he had made me; it was a gold watch, with the cipher of my name enamelled on the case, and the face surrounded with pearls. His business, it was expected, would detain him near three years, during which

 time

time my father had a young man articled to him; he was an orphan possessed of a decent property, which his guardian wished him to better by trade, and therefore placed him for instruction with my father. This young man was about five years older than myself; and by his engaging manners, before I was seventeen, had made an impression on my heart, which, however, at that time was not suspected by any one. At this period we received a letter, informing us that speedily we might expect to see my uncle, as he proposed returning to Europe by the first ship that sailed; but, how great was our sorrow and disappointment, when, some time after, we learned that he had indeed sailed, but that the vessel had been cast away on the coast of Caffraria; and what became of the crew that escaped the waves was uncertain. This news was a heavy blow to my mother, who loved her brother with unfeigned affection; yet for two years

we

we flattered ourselves with the hope of his return, at which period our expectations began to decrease. For my own part, I confess I loved my uncle better than my father, for he was indulgent to all my whimsies; while, on the contrary, my father could not allow for the errors, or even the playfulness of childhood; you may therefore readily judge my tears were sincere for his loss. My father still continued the management of my uncle's property, as in the case of his death my mother was heir-at-law, he imprudently having left no will.

"I was just nineteen when young Palmer's articles to my father expired, and he settled for himself. He lamented with me the loss of my uncle, as that event would apparently increase my fortune beyond what he could expect, especially as my father was rather addicted to a love of wealth, and my mother's will was ever subservient to his.

"Thus were we situated when I un-

happily lost my mother in an apoplectic fit, by which means my uncle's property became totally vested in my father. I shall pass over my grief for this loss, which, however, I assure you was great, as was also my father's for a considerable time, he applying himself with redoubled earnestness to business to banish thought; and settling all my uncle's affairs on the most lucrative principles, the estate, which remained unsold in Jamaica, he disposed of, together with the negroes that cultivated it, and who, during my uncle's life, and indeed until this period, had been so happily situated as to have no wish to change, being only under the command of the negro who saved my uncle's life, and who had from him received his liberty, making him also overseer of the plantation he reserved—a trust he executed with justice to his employer, credit to himself, and to the universal satisfaction of his fellows.

"My father was enabled not only to do

do this, but also to make what other changes he thought necessary; as previous to my uncle's departure, he had given him a letter of attorney to act, in case any alteration should be found necessary in his absence. He had been gone five years at my mother's death, and a year had elapsed since that period, when my father formed a connexion unworthy either his understanding, situation, or age. In short, it was with the servant that immediately attended me, and who was about four years older than myself. I was involuntarily a spectator of some little freedoms that passed between them, but which I thought it most prudent not to notice for some time, though she grew negligent of her business, and was frequently absent at those hours when she knew I should particularly want her.

"I was not weak enough to suppose I had power to break this connexion, but, on mature deliberation, concluded

it would be less vexatious to me, if pursued in any other place than immediately in the house where I dwelt; and accordingly, one evening, after her remaining out very late, I gave her a dismission, desiring she would seek another situation, as I had no further occasion for her services. I am not naturally passionate, and gave this discharge in my usual manner, and without entering into the cause of my displeasure; yet she answered me with uncommon insolence, saying—'You mistake, madam; you will have more occasion than ever for my services, and must likewise learn to deserve them, or you may find yourself uncomfortably situated.' With this she bounced out of the room, leaving me both distressed and astonished, as her threats appeared to imply a greater power over my father than I could either suspect or dread.

"The next morning, at breakfast, my father was uncommonly serious, and continued

tinued to treat me with a kind of gloomy reserve for some days, without, however, mentioning the subject of his displeasure, until one evening, after supper, first increasing his courage by two or three glasses of wine extraordinary, he ventured to tell me he had been very uncomfortable since the death of my mother. I naturally expressed my sorrow at this information, hoping no neglect of mine had added to it; declaring he had only to name what had given him displeasure, and I would be particularly careful to remedy it. Before I could proceed he interrupted me, saying —'No, no, I cannot accuse you of neglect; but I have thoughts, Anna, of marrying again, and therefore would prepare you to receive the woman I shall choose, with the respect becoming my wife and your mother.'

"The business was now plain; but endeavouring to conceal my dissatisfaction, though a bad dissembler, I replied

 —'As

—'As the object of your choice, sir, will doubtless be respectable, I must necessarily esteem her, though I cannot flatter myself with meeting the tender affection of a first parent.'

'I possess the means of making her respectable,' answered my father, drinking another glass of wine; 'and I have no one's inclination to consult but my own.'

"I bowed my acquiescence. He soon after retired for the night; and the first news that reached me the ensuing morning was, that at an early hour he had taken Mary with him in the postchaise, and set off for the country.

"Two days after, their marriage was publicly declared, though they continued for a fortnight out of town. I leave you to judge the uneasiness I experienced. I was totally dependent on my father, whom I had every reason to fear would be a slave to the caprices of the woman he had married, and whom

I naturally

I naturally concluded would be my enemy, were it not only that I was apprised of her conduct before he espoused her. I can truly aver, that had he married a virtuous and worthy object, whatever had been her situation, my pride would never have overcome me so far as to forget what was due to my father's wife; but my heart recoiled both at her former conduct and insolence, so that I knew not how to receive her. Deliberating on this subject two or three days after the marriage, Palmer was announced, and immediately admitted. After the usual salutations—'I will not congratulate you,' said he, 'on your father's marriage; though I will, my Anna, truly confess it has given rise to hopes I before dared not cherish, as I think he may now be the more inclined to part with you.'

"I have already said I was partial to Palmer, and was yet more; for I sincerely

 loved

loved him; and though possessed of nothing romantic in my disposition, had determined, that if ever I married, he should be my husband. Little persuasion therefore obtained my consent that he should apply to my father, as I had judged he would, as well as his wife, be pleased at my removal. I was, however, mistaken; my father desired time to consider; and consulting my new mother, an absolute denial was the consequence. I could attribute this but to one cause, which was, that she suspected my affection for Palmer, and took a malignant pleasure in thwarting my inclinations.

"After this refusal, Palmer wrote to entreat me to accept his hand without the consent of my father: his business, he said, was prosperous, and my fortune never an incentive; and that he was convinced I was unhappily situated at home.

"Pleased at the generosity of this offer, I however

I however declined it, at least for the present, as I wanted ten months of being of age, but promised at that time to answer him more fully.—I should but weary you by relating all the despicable methods my father's wife put in practice to render my situation unpleasant, while he, who was absolute in my mother's lifetime, had no will but what this woman pleased, and was blindly subservient to all her arts. We seldom met but at meals. I was polite, but cold, familiarity being as much avoided by me as absolutely displeasing her; as, in the first place, I must have been obliged to suffer perpetually the empty vulgarity of her conversation, and in the latter all the vindictiveness of narrow ideas and confined education. My father's fondness was entirely founded on her person, which, indeed, was good; his was likewise flattered by the show of affection, which she was continually and disgust-

ingly

ingly bestowing on him; and if he had a grain of paternal love left for me, it entirely vanished, when, six months after her marriage, she declared herself with child.

"My father came from 'Change one day, accompanied by an elderly man, who was a dry-salter of considerable fortune, but had risen unexpectedly to his present affluence by the death of a relation, stepping at once into a great fortune, but destitute of understanding, education, or even common politeness. This man honoured me with his good liking, and made proposals to my father, which his wife approving, were immediately accepted; and I was desired to regard Mr. Brewer (which was his name) as my future husband. I have already told you I was not romantic, therefore I neither wept nor threw myself at my father's feet, but before his lady simply desired him, on my part, to thank Mr. Brewer

Brewer for his good opinion, but that I could not accept his offer.

'And pray why not?' said my father; 'what are your objections?'

'In the first place,' replied I, 'he is low-bred and illiterate, which, I think, my dear sir, is a powerful objection, and sufficient without any other.'

"Mrs. Sommerton looked as though she could have struck me, while my father gave a hem, and took a pinch of snuff.

'And pray what other great objection can you make?' said my father.

'As great a difference in age as disposition,' replied I.

'You perhaps,' resumed my father, 'have forgotten the change in your circumstances, and consider yourself as my immediate heir; but I would wish you to recollect the alteration that has taken place—I may now have a numerous family to share my property.'

"I could scarcely suppress a smile, but

but replied—'To prove to you, sir, that I have not disregarded that circumstance, it was in order to lessen your family that I consented to Mr. Palmer's entreating your approbation to our union.'

'So then, Miss,' said Mrs. Sommerton, 'it is not matrimony that you object to, but the man.'

'Exactly so, madam,' replied I, forgetting my usual coolness; 'there are some men as well as women whom I view with peculiar dislike.'

"Mrs. Sommerton at once applied my answer to herself, and choosing rather to interest my father by her softness than by her spirit, pretended to burst into tears, and be ready to faint; my father, in the mean time, entreating her to be pacified, and vowing no one should offend her with impunity, concluded with telling me that he regarded Mr. Brewer's as an unexceptionable offer, and which, if I did not accept, he would to-

tally

tally disclaim me; bidding me consider what he had said, and on the morrow return my answer.

'It needs no time, my dear sir,' replied I—'to-morrow can make no difference; grieved as I am, and ever must be at your displeasure, yet Mr. Brewer shall never be my husband.'

'My dear love,' said Mrs. Sommerton, addressing my father, 'give way a little; Miss Anna is in love with Mr. Palmer, and your severity may make her regardless of consequences, and elope with him.'

'Do not think it, madam,' replied I, provoked at her duplicity; 'I will never forget what is due to my father while he recollects I am his daughter; nor will I ever form a connexion so serious as marriage without his consent, unless absolutely forced to it. In that case, madam, I will neither leap out of the window, nor fly to Gretna Green, but wait until I am of age, which will be in three months, then

then walk into the first parish church I meet with, and give my hand where I have already bestowed my heart.'

"My father was so much provoked at this reply, that he ordered me to leave the room—a command which I instantly obeyed.

"My situation from this period was, if possible, ten times more irksome than before. My father refused to dismiss Brewer; I therefore took that task upon myself, and was soon freed from his persecutions, though his acquiescence redoubled the rancour of Mrs. Sommerton towards me, and consequently the ill-will of my father. The old servants, many of whom were grown grey in our service, were discharged on various pretences, the smallest particle of attention to me being certain to procure their immediate dismission.

"Thus disagreeably passed my time until I completed my twenty-first year, when Palmer once more, at my request, pressed

pressed my father to consent to our union, nor did I scruple to second the entreaty; but fruitless was the attempt, though Palmer's prospects might have entitled him to a fortune superior to what my father now declared he meant to give me, if I married with his consent (which was ten thousand pounds); but if I disposed of myself without his concurrence, I was to expect nothing. Mrs. Sommerton being likewise present when my father gave his final determination, appeared to exult in thus crossing our wishes; while Palmer seemed overpowered with disappointment and vexation, declaring that his solicitation was not with an interested view, but merely to procure my father's approbation. As he well knew I held his concurrence necessary to my happiness, he entreated to be informed if there were any thing in his conduct or circumstances that operated to his disadvantage, as he would endeavour to remove it; or if that was impracticable,

cable, should at least have the satisfaction of knowing why he was refused.

"All these concessions, however, were productive of nothing more than a repetition of the refusal, Mrs. Sommerton adding, with her usual insolence, that as matters stood, his visits at our house would be dispensed with.

"I kept silence until the whole conversation was concluded, and Palmer was advancing towards the door, when calling him back, I said—'I have listened with uneasiness through this disagreeable business. Had my father any reasonable objection to you, and would condescend to explain it, far be it from me to act in opposition to his wishes; but as he advances none, I naturally conclude it proceeds not from himself, (looking firmly at Mrs. Sommerton) and therefore set it aside, and freely offer you my hand, if, poor as I am, you will accept it. The niece of Mr. Walters should, indeed, have brought her husband

some

some fortune, but which, if you can overlook, I will never regret, and in its stead endeavour cheerfully, with prudence and affection, to make up the deficiency.'

"To describe what followed is beyond my power. Mrs. Sommerton endeavoured to appear shocked at my undutifulness and ingratitude, while Palmer expressed his transports, as though I had a throne to bestow with my hand; my father alternately soothing his wife, and uttering vows of vengeance against me; finally declaring, as I had formed my resolution, the sooner I left the house the better.

"In this temper we separated, and I retired to my own room for the remainder of the day, during which I received a letter from Palmer, entreating me to be prepared at eight the following morning, at which time he proposed to call for me with a licence, and, accompanied by his late guardian, who would

act

act as my father on the occasion at the parish church.

"In the evening I wrote to my father, inclosing Palmer's letter, entreating him, by every thing he held most sacred, and by the beloved memory of my mother, not to cast me off; but my writing was equally ineffectual as my prayers, for he simply returned for answer—'That I had chosen my fate, and must abide by it—all he desired was to hear no more of me.'

"The next morning Palmer was true to his time, and, accompanied by his friend, we reached the church; where I was united to a man whom I loved living, and whose memory must be ever dear to me—the man who won my virgin heart, and never gave me cause to repent its disposal."

Mrs. Palmer's voice became tremulous, and suddenly rising—"I will relate the remainder to-morrow night," said she; "it is now almost supper-time."

CHAP.

CHAPTER VIII.



THE following evening Mrs. Palmer resumed her narrative.

"As I brought my husband no fortune, I thought it my duty to be peculiarly economical, and had the satisfaction, at the end of two years after our marriage, to find our expences kept considerably within our income; add to which, I thought myself the happiest of wives and mothers, for that time had given us a lovely boy. My father's unnatural behaviour, and the recollection of my uncle, were the only subjects that gave me pain; the former had a son born in about two months after my marriage; and the death of the latter was no longer doubted.

"My

"My felicity had continued for two years, when a capital banking-house at Amsterdam, and an eminent commercial one at London, in both of which my husband was nearly concerned, stopped payment, and gave at once a blow to our prosperity and happiness, for every effort to retrieve the loss was tried in vain; my husband was unavoidably a bankrupt, and all our effects barely sufficient to pay twelve shillings in the pound. So highly was my husband respected, that had he but possessed a sum to have enabled him to wait the returns of trade, he might have obtained credit to any amount, and surmounted every difficulty; but we had given up all without reserve, and had no resource—my father, to whom I, unknown to my husband, applied, refusing to advance a single thousand pounds; and, to add to my calamity, Palmer's health had received a blow, in consequence of his misfortunes, that I much feared might

terminate

terminate fatally. Thus situated, we determined for some time to remove a little distance from London for change of air, which I hoped might prove salutary, and accordingly took lodgings in the most private part of Islington; the few valuables I possessed, and my household linen, which had been spared by the kindness of the creditors, being our whole fund, and all the reserve we had to trust to. Though we lived with the utmost frugality, and kept but one servant, yet our means daily decreased, and I considered with anguish the poverty that was ready to overtake us: determined to protract it as long as possible, I yet more retrenched our expences, moving to a cheaper lodging, and discharging the only servant I kept.

"In this manner passed the first year of our misfortunes; Palmer's malady, by almost imperceptible degrees, undermining his constitution, and rendering him unable to make any exertion to extricate

us from our unhappy situation, or even to soften its asperity.

"One day, that he had been yet more disordered than usual, he walked out for air into the fields, leaving me engaged in my domestic concerns, but had not gone far, when he was seized with a pleuritic pain and shortness of breath, that rendered him unable either to proceed or return.

"Hoping it would abate, he sat himself down in a field where some haymakers were at work, but in a short time became so much worse, that his illness was perceptible to the labourers, several of whom came and spoke to him; and, among others, a negro, whom perhaps you will truly surmise was Felix.

"Mr. Palmer by this time was almost unable to speak, and could only faintly signify his desire to get home; but his pain was too violent for him to be able to walk, and in the middle of the fields no conveyance could be obtained.

"In

" In this dilemma Felix flew off with the utmost speed, and reaching the town, ran into the first apothecary's shop he could meet with, entreating the master, for the love of Heaven, to come into the fields, for that a man had been seized with so violent a pain in the side, that he feared, without immediate assistance, it would prove fatal. The apothecary, who doubtless surmised, from the appearance of Felix, it was one of his fellow-labourers, replied by desiring him to lead the sick man to his shop, and he would bleed him, which he did not doubt would afford relief, but that himself had not time to go so far.

'Not time!' replied Felix; 'then the poor soul must die, for I am sure he cannot walk hither; besides, I thought it was your profession to *attend* the sick, not the sick to attend you.'

'You are an impudent fellow,' answered the apothecary, 'to suppose I should walk almost a mile to bleed a

man for sixpence, or perhaps for nothing: but go about your business—there is a barber a few doors farther, that will perhaps suit your purpose; for my part, I never step over the threshold to let blood under half-a-crown.'

"Felix paused, then fumbling for a moment in his bosom, pulled out a dollar, in which a small hole had been drilled, and a piece of ribbon drawn through.—'Here,' said he, 'I have no money but this; keep it till to-morrow night, and I will redeem it if the sick man cannot pay you; for he must not die for want of help. I have then my week's hire to receive; all I beg is, you will be careful of it.'

"As he spoke he held out the dollar; but the apothecary, doubtless ashamed to be outdone by this simple child of nature, putting back his offered hand, replied—'No, no'—and snatching down his hat, bade Felix lead the way.

"On their arrival at the spot where Mr.

Mr. Palmer still sat, he was immediately bled, and in half an hour so greatly relieved as to be able to walk home, attended by the apothecary and the friendly Felix, the former being now as assiduous as he was at first careless; for though we were in reality very much reduced, Palmer had still an appearance of respectability.

'Had you told me,' said the apothecary, as they were helping Palmer home, 'that it was a gentleman who was taken so ill in the fields, I should not have hesitated a moment; but as you spoke, I protest I thought it was one of your comrades.'

'I was not sufficiently acquainted with European customs, to know that such a distinction was necessary,' replied Felix, dryly; 'but you may depend, hereafter I will not fail to remember it; and every man that wants assistance shall by me be styled a *gentleman*.'

'Thou art an odd fellow,' said the

 apothecary;

apothecary: 'have you been long in England?'

'Long enough,' replied Felix, 'to convince me of the erroneous opinion I had formed for the first forty years of my life of Englishmen, whose hearts, I had persuaded myself, were as good as their faces, but have learned, to my cost, the only difference between many of them and us is, we bear the black without—they within.'

"Palmer, in spite of pain, could not suppress a smile.—'I am glad,' said he, 'you do not include *all* in your account, as it seems to imply you have met some few who deserve approbation.'

'Approbation,' replied Felix, 'is a cold word—I could almost say adoration: but it is past—meteors are not frequent, nor in your country subjects of worship. I indeed knew one, whose virtues made this land dear to me; but he is gone to heaven, as you call it, or the land of souls, it is the same thing,

and

and where even negroes will rejoice to meet him.'

"This discourse brought them home, and was repeated to me both by Palmer and the apothecary, the latter declaring it had made an impression on him never to be effaced, and which would oblige him henceforward to attend sufferers, without questioning their pretensions to gentility. Palmer was much better in the evening, at which time Felix did not fail to come, and inquire after him with great respect.

"Recovered from my first alarm, I was not yet so destitute, but that I had it in my power to offer him some small compensation for his trouble and the time he had lost; but declining it, he drew back, saying—'No, madam, I labour for hire—I have not laboured for your husband.'

'But your labour,' said I, 'is not, I fear, sufficient to support you in the necessaries of life: stranger as you are, you

cannot be supposed to possess the resources of a native.'

'Industry, madam,' replied he, 'is universally understood; and with health fully adequate to sustain the wants of man, it procures me bread, and sometimes meat, this habit to shelter me from the weather, and at night a place of rest for my wearied limbs.'

"I put my money back into my pocket, at once humiliated and pleased, saying, mentally—'A diamond is equally precious, whether enclosed in a casket of ebony or ivory.'

"From this time our friendly negro, by my desire, frequently called, and was ever anxious to render us a number of little services that he thought we might feel derogatory. My little boy, who was now turned of two years old, had at first been frightened at his appearance, but by the gentleness of his manners had grown so attached, that he never failed to cry after him.

"Thiee

"Three months had now passed since we knew Felix, whom I frequently determined to question respecting his former life, but was so entirely occupied by my domestic concerns, and the still-declining health of Palmer, that it was ever neglected; besides, the name of *master* never escaped him unaccompanied by a tear; and I could not bear to gratify my curiosity by renewing his distress, which must apparently have been the case; his stay, too, whenever he called, was short, as he constantly laboured in the fields or gardens in the neighbourhood of Islington, his visits being merely, as his conduct shewed, to endeavour to do us service, as fetching me coals, cleaning Palmer's clothes, or any other little office he could devise, ever refusing money—at most accepting the remains of our frugal table, and a draught of beer.

"At this period my little darling was seized with the smallpox, of a most ma-

lignant kind; and for three weeks my heart was alternately torn with anguish, or revived by hope, as the symptoms increased or abated. Regardless of my poverty, so I could save my child, I spared no expence, employing every able physician I heard recommended, but in vain: I was doomed to be childless, and to survive those ties dearer to me than life."

Mrs. Palmer ceased for a moment, and perceiving both Fanny and Agnes wept, she said, crossing her own eyes with her handkerchief—"I rejoice, Agnes, at this proof of your sensibility; it is a plain demonstration that your own sorrows have not selfishly narrowed your heart, as they yet leave you a tear to bestow on others.

"I shall pass over the death of my son," continued Mrs. Palmer, "for the subject even yet is painful; suffice it that I found myself not even possessed of money to lay his beloved remains de-

cently

cently in the earth; all our little valuables and linen had been disposed of; the watch given me by my uncle alone remained, and which had been preserved merely from affection to the giver. My husband, depressed by a long illness, on the loss of his son, appeared totally to sink under his calamities, and to regard every thing around him with an insensibility that cruelly alarmed me. To consult him then in this dreadful crisis was useless, and could answer no end but increasing his distress. To apply to my father I knew would be unavailing; nor could I bear the thought of giving his unworthy wife the pleasure of triumphing over my misery. Felix had been daily with us since the child's sickness, and, in spite of all opposition, had frequently sat up with him, attending him with a tenderness that, even young as he was, he was sensible of; for the evening before he died he said, as he held Felix by the hand—' Dear papa and mamma

always love Felix, for he loves me.' But I wander from my subject, which was to pass the child's death," continued she; "but the fond partiality of a parent involuntarily beguiled me. Unable, as I before observed, to consult Palmer, and without any resource but the watch given me by my uncle, I determined to part with it, and for that purpose calling Felix into the garden, I disclosed my intention, and asked if he could take it to London and sell it for me, as I really myself was unable. Felix had been too much with us to be ignorant that we laboured under difficulties, yet seemed distressed at this proof of it; but promised implicitly to obey me, and repair to a capital watchmaker, whom I specified, and return with the money as speedily as possible. This settled, Felix took the watch, and left me about nine o'clock in the morning. As he had only to go to Cheapside, I naturally supposed he might return in about a couple of hours;

hours; but five had passed without his appearance, and I began to be uneasy. I did not doubt the honesty of Felix, but dreaded some accident had befallen him, yet did not venture to declare my fears to Palmer. At length I heard a knock at the door, and hastening down, I met Felix in the passage, but at the house-door discovered a man apparently waiting. Wishing to speak to him unheard, I stepped into the little parlour, and was upon the point of questioning him, when raising my eyes to his face, the animation of his features astonished me.—'What has happened, Felix?' said I; 'surely you have met with something uncommonly pleasing!'

'Uncommonly pleasing!' repeated he. 'Oh! I am too happy!' but suddenly appearing to recollect himself, and to struggle with his feelings—'the man, madam,' continued he—'that is—the watch, madam—the gentleman waits.'

'For Heaven's sake, what do you mean,

mean, Felix?' replied I; 'surely you do not drink? Tell me, what said the watchmaker?'

'Say, madam,' answered he, apparently lost in some other subject; 'why, he blessed God, and said ten thousand pounds!' Again suddenly endeavouring to recall his mistake, he added—'The gentleman waits—do let me call him in.'

"Distressed for the loss of my child, and my heart torn with anguish from my unhappy situation, I replied, peevishly—'What do you mean? what gentleman? where is the watch?'

"Felix then gave me to understand, though in the same incoherent manner, that the watchmaker would not purchase it without seeing the owner, lest it should be dishonestly obtained, and had sent a gentleman with him for that purpose.

"Convinced that Felix was in liquor, I advanced towards the door to call in the

the stranger; but regardless of compliments, he rushed before me, saying—'Walk in, sir, pray walk in, Heaven bless you!'

"The stranger immediately entered; he was a man in the decline of life, and of a very respectable appearance.—'I am sorry, sir,' said I, 'that you have taken the trouble; the watch is mine; a cruel emergency obliges me (Heaven knows how unwilling) to part with it.' As I spoke I could not restrain my tears, nor was the stranger unmoved.

'As you appear, madam, to value it so highly,' replied he, 'pardon me, but can nothing else supply this emergency, as trinkets, rings, or other female decorations?'

'Alas! they are all gone,' cried I, weeping; 'this only remains; it was the gift of my more than father; and nothing but the distress of the present moment could force me to part with it, to lay the beloved remains of my infant

in

in the earth, and to nourish the expiring spark of life that yet remains in the best of husbands.'

'And what, madam, do you ask for it?' replied he, turning aside his head.

'Alas!' answered I, 'I am no judge; I see you feel for my distress, and will not, I am sure, wrong me; I am willing to abide by your decision.'

"On his first entrance he had drawn the watch from his pocket, and laid it upon the table that stood between us.

'Well, then,' said he, after a pause, and with increased emotion, 'I think thirty pounds is nearly the value; it has apparently been carefully kept.'

"His offer was double what I expected; for the price obtained for the things already sold scarcely amounted to a third of their value.

'I am content,' said I, weeping; and taking it, as I thought for the last time, in my hand, could not refrain pressing it to my lips. 'Farewell,' cried I, 'last

token

token of the best beloved of friends! Could he even see me in this hour of anguish, I should obtain his pardon.'

'Thou hast it, my Anna! my child!' exclaimed the stranger, clasping me in his arms; 'henceforward doubly endeared by thy misfortunes.'

"I was so lost in astonishment, that I had not power to repulse the stranger, had I been so inclined; but fixing my eyes in silence on him, I eagerly endeavoured to trace the person of my uncle Walters, but in vain; my uncle was fair, lusty, and wore a brown wig, while this stranger was uncommonly dark-complexioned, thin, and wore his own hair, which was as white as flax.

'And have ten years totally obliterated thy uncle Walters from thy memory, Anna?' cried he. 'Indeed, I believe my person is changed, but my heart is still the same.'

"My pleasure and amazement were too great for words; I threw myself on his

his neck, and wept in silence. Felix, who had withdrawn as soon as my uncle entered, had in the mean time been with Mr. Palmer, to whom, not being charged to keep silence as he was to me, he had disclosed the happy meeting that was taking place, and returned down stairs with him at the moment I was weeping on the neck of my uncle.

"In a few moments Mr. Walters seated me in a chair, and affectionately saluted my husband, telling him all his pecuniary difficulties were over, and to look forward to health and happiness.

"In the mean time, the behaviour of Felix was still far from calm, and might have alarmed an uninformed spectator for his intellects; he walked round his master (for Felix was the identical slave that had before saved his life), examined his face, touched his hair, rubbed his own hands in an ecstacy of joy, and finally snatching up my uncle's hat that lay in the window, kissed it with transport.

"Our

"Our tumults being a little subsided, my uncle bestowed a tear to the memory of my child, but peremptorily insisted that all the care of the funeral should centre in himself, thus kindly endeavouring to spare me what he truly surmised must increase my sorrow.

CHAPTER IX.

"A FEW days after the remains of my infant were consigned to the earth, Mr. Palmer and myself, at the express desire of my uncle, removed to his house, which he commanded me henceforth to consider as my own.

"The first emotions of grief for the loss of my son, and the joy of meeting my uncle, were no sooner subsided, than mutual inquiries took place of all that had

had befallen us during a ten years' separation.

"My uncle informed us that he had, as we truly heard, been cast away on his return from India, on the coast of Caffraria, about three years after he left England; that the greater part of the crew had perished in the wreck, twenty-four only escaping, twenty of whom had endeavoured to explore their way to the Cape of Good Hope, but had doubtless perished either by hunger or from the natives, as they had never reached it. For the others, two were my uncle's domestics, and the third a young man, his clerk, who attended him on his voyage; all of whom determined to share his fortunes when he refused to accompany the party who sought the Cape, being convinced it was impracticable without knowing the country; and a store of provisions, the small stock they had been able to procure from the wreck, being soon expended.

"The

"The inhabitants of the coast had at first behaved with ferocity, but finding the unhappy intruders too few in number to give them alarm, and likewise unarmed, and willing to part with any thing they possessed, as their clothes, watches, or money (the two last-mentioned of which they converted into ornaments), they soon became familiarized, and supplied them with milk, rice, and venison, sufficient for their support. My uncle's design was, if possible, to gain their confidence sufficiently to persuade some, who were best acquainted with the country, to accompany them to one of the Dutch settlements; for to undertake to walk such an extensive tract of land, penetrate the thick forests, cross such rapid rivers, or climb the almost perpendicular mountains, without a guide, was at once vain and impracticable. None, however, of the inhabitants of the settlement had ever been at any great distance from home (as they

informed

informed them when they began to comprehend a little of the language, nor would, for any reward, undertake such a journey. Thus circumstanced, my uncle thought his destination fixed, and endeavoured to comfort his companions. With the approbation of the natives they erected themselves a hut, and surrounded it, in the manner of the Caffres, with a plantation of rice. The clerk, who was a youth, and one of the domestics, who was likewise young, by infinite perseverance, learned to throw the assagay with so much skill, that it not only procured them plenty of food, but raised them much in the opinion of the inhabitants, who saw them with pleasure give into their customs, and adopt their weapons.

"In this manner passed three years, my uncle and his eldest domestic convinced they should draw their last breath in this country, and the younger people only withheld from the wild undertaking

dertaking of exploring their way to the Cape by affection for their companions. At this period, two brothers (natives) who had been made prisoners in a contest with some neighbouring nations, returned, after five years absence, the greater part of which time they had resided in the distant country of the Auteniquas. Travelling, or perhaps the difficulties they had endured, had enlarged their minds; for they treated the strangers with more humanity than any of their companions, and after holding various discourses with them, as they now perfectly understood the language, said, that affection for their father had alone induced them to return, being much better pleased with the inland country than the coast; and that, was their parent no more, for a proper reward they would not scruple to risk the journey, but that during his life nothing should tempt them to forsake him.

"This discourse again revived their hopes,

hopes, for the travellers' father was very old and infirm, which gave them daily expectation of their wishes being soon fulfilled; but, to their great disappointment, he lingered two years. He was no sooner dead than my uncle renewed his promises of reward, and, in short, soon obtained what he had so long solicited, they agreeing to accompany him to the first Dutch settlement, where he had no doubt but, by making himself known, he could obtain credit for the promised reward, which was to consist of iron, tobacco, and other articles, considered by them as particularly desirable.

"The difficulties they encountered during this journey were innumerable, and would have been impossible for them to support, but for the resources which necessity had taught the natives, whose skill at their weapons constantly procured food, the country abounding in elks, &c. They were likewise well versed in the necessary precautions to

secure

secure them from the attacks of wild beasts. Some days they could not advance more than four or five miles, from the obstacles they met with, as thick woods and steep mountains; at other times were detained by waiting the reflux of prodigious rivers, which they were obliged to cross, or to coast along the banks at the expence of both time and fatigue. At length, however, they reached a Dutch settlement, where their appearance caused no small surprise; for my uncle, as well as his companions, were naked, the small remains of covering the natives had left them having been so long worn out, that they were grown perfectly familiarized to the omission, and their skins changed to the complexion of copper.

CHAPTER X.

"The Dutch factor received them with tolerable kindness, but did not appear willing to advance a reward my uncle thought adequate to the services of the Caffres; he therefore, without much difficulty, persuaded them to accompany him to the Cape; and after some stay they resumed their journey, and to their great satisfaction, at length reached it.

"My uncle was well acquainted with two capital merchants there; one, to his great disappointment, he found was dead; but was more fortunate in his second inquiry, though this friend at first did not know him; but after some few preliminaries, acknowledged, and readily embraced him, insisting that he should take up his residence at his house, and draw

draw on him for what sums he found necessary.

"My uncle at first thought to write to England, but after a short time, determined to surprise his friends. The merchant's offer he willingly accepted; his first care being to reward his guides to the utmost extent of their wishes, dismissing them with four oxen loaded with what they thought most valuable.

"The business settled, he waited for a homeward-bound Indiaman, and at length embarked with his three faithful companions for Europe, which he reached after a pleasant voyage.

"On his first landing he immediately repaired to my father's; and though his appearance was now very respectable, yet the change his person had undergone rendered him perfectly unknown; he, however, soon made himself acknowledged, and then learned, to his grief, that his sister was dead; and myself, his great favourite, married to a worthless

man, who had lately become a bankrupt, and with whom I was now withdrawn, no one knew whither. It was not my uncle's custom to condemn unheard; he therefore determined, if possible, to see me, for he found no great predilection for my father's wife, and even declined taking up his residence with them. He had been but a fortnight in England when he met with Felix, and had already advertised three times, desiring me, if alive, to apply to his attorney, or if any one could give intelligence respecting me, offering a reward. This kindness had, however, been fruitless, for we never saw the newspapers; nor did any one, since our last removal, know where to find us, as we wished to conceal our miseries from the world.

"The morning my uncle fortunately met with Felix, he had accidentally, in passing along Cheapside, recollected that he wanted a watch; and walking into a shop, the man had shewed him several,

and they were on the point of making an agreement when Felix entered. My uncle recollected him at once, but astonished to find him in England, stood for a moment lost in surprise, and seeing him offer a watch for sale, determined, if possible, to remain undiscovered, and wait the event; but what was his astonishment, on taking the watch from the hand of the shopkeeper, to recognize it for the same he had formerly given to me!—'How came you by this watch, my friend?' said my uncle, addressing him in a kind voice; 'it appears to be a woman's, and of some value.'

"Though my uncle's person had totally escaped the notice of Felix, yet the sound of his voice startled him, and viewing him for a moment with fixed attention, he answered, withdrawing his eyes with a sigh—'Bless your voice, it is like music to my heart! The watch is not mine, but a lady's, who must sell it to pay those rites which your coun-

 try's

try's custom demands, before the body of her child can be permitted to mingle with the dust; to hire men who assume the semblance of sorrow with a black coat, and pay for a peculiar spot of earth, as if all on which the sun shines was not equally hallowed!'

'And what is the lady's name?' said my uncle.

'Palmer,' replied Felix.

"My uncle made no reply, but seating himself by the counter, remained lost in thought.

'And what do you ask for the watch?' said the shopkeeper, addressing Felix.

'She leaves it to yourself,' returned he; 'she is no judge; but I conjure you, by the God you profess to serve, consider her distress, and do her justice —a dead infant!—an almost dying husband!—weigh these sorrows ere you speak. Ah! had you seen her part with it, you could have judged of its value.'—

value.'—'It was the gift of my best friend,' said she, then pressed it to her lips and wept: it is yet dull with her tears!'

'I will kiss them off,' cried my uncle, snatching the watch. 'Ten thousand pounds shall not purchase it.'

"The shopkeeper looked astonished, while Felix again fixed his eyes attentively on the face of my uncle with visible agitation.

'Have ten years hardship and grey hairs made such an alteration, Felix,' said my uncle, 'that I have lost a friend, the preserver of my life?'

"Felix gave a loud cry, and fell senseless at his feet.

"By the care of the master of the shop, Felix was soon restored; but his effusions were ungovernable; he could neither ask nor answer questions; all was genuine transport, unmixed with form or restraint, and spoke the unadulterated language of nature.

"At length, being somewhat calmer, my uncle informed him, that he suspected the owner of the watch was his niece, and desired to know how he became acquainted with me.

"Felix disjointedly related what he knew, mixing the whole with encomiums on myself and Mr. Palmer, not forgetting a tear to my little one.

"My uncle then determined to accompany him back; charging him to say nothing of what had passed, but to introduce him as a person sent to conclude the bargain for the watch.

"Felix certainly obeyed him to the best of his power; but nature in him was superior to art, and, in spite of all his endeavours, could hardly be restrained.

"I have now informed you how my uncle and Felix met, and have only to tell you that, even when surrounded with affluence, I was to feel yet more acutely than ever, for in three months after

after finding my uncle, I lost my beloved husband; his misfortunes had made an impression never to be erased, and which totally ruined his health. Bath, and the various watering-places in the kingdom, were tried in vain; he died in my arms, one of his hands locked in that of my uncle, blessing the Almighty that he had lived to see me secured from want, and perfectly resigned to his fate. Pardon me, my friends, though time has also taught me resignation, yet can I not forget that I was once a wife and mother—tender claims! ye are written on my heart in traits never to be obliterated."

Mrs. Palmer ceased, and for some time gave vent to the emotion painful recollection occasions; nor were her auditors unmoved—all bore silent sympathy; Godwin rose and walked to the window—Agnes had involuntarily laid

hold of her hand; and Fanny instinctively drawn her chair close to hers.

"It is past," said Mrs. Palmer. "I will conclude a narrative that I am not sorry to see has interested you; it will teach *you*, Agnes, that there are others equally unfortunate with yourself."

"Equally unfortunate," replied Agnes, "they may be; but few, I hope, have equal cause for self-reproach."

Mrs. Palmer, to prevent farther discourse on the subject, resumed her narrative.

"Though I by no means aggravated the behaviour of Mrs. Sommerton, and totally endeavoured to exculpate my father, yet my uncle came to an immediate settlement with him, reimbursing him for the trouble he had taken, and having a prodigious sum to receive, the interest

interest having accumulated on the principal for ten years.

"A coldness had subsisted between them ever since my uncle discovered me; and the business between them was no sooner completed than an entire alienation took place, which my father's wife did not fail to attribute to the influence my art had gained over my uncle.

"He next settled his domestic economy, giving me the entire command, and retaining Felix, by his own desire, about his person, rendering him first independent, that in case his mind should hereafter change, he might be under no restraint.

"For the faithful attendants who were shipwrecked with him, the clerk he retained as steward to his estates; and for the other two, the elder retired upon a comfortable provision, and the younger married, was by my uncle settled in a lucrative business.

"I have now but little more to tell you. My friendly kind uncle survived his return ten years: in him at once I lost a tender parent and a sincere friend; nor could his whole fortune, which he left me without restriction, have any effect but making me more sensible of my loss, as it plainly proved how truly he esteemed me. The disposal of my uncle's effects, as you may suppose, was very displeasing to my father, whom, however, I have never seen, though he is still living. On my uncle's death, I endeavoured to banish my melancholy, by travelling and change of place. Inglewood I had frequently heard him speak of, but never seen, as it was purchased before he went abroad, and had not been visited since his return, his precarious health usually confining us in the neighbourhood of the capital, for the advantage of medical assistance. The situation particularly pleased me; and disliking a town life, I determined to

to fix my residence there—a resolution I do not think I shall change, as I esteem my neighbours, and hope they do the same by me."

Mrs. Palmer ceased, and received the thanks of Godwin and his daughters, the former of whom said—"Esteem, madam, however flattering the term may be when applied from you to us, is not comprehensive enough to express what we owe to you; add to it gratitude and affection, and it will more nearly declare the sentiments your kindness has inspired."

"Ah!" said Agnes, "I shall never more, madam, look on Felix's face with dislike; I shall consider him as attending the little sufferer, and forget his complexion."

"I always liked him," added Fanny; "but from this day he will be yet more estimable to me."

"I shall leave you to-morrow," replied Mrs. Palmer, "and will desire him, in

in my absence, to relate to you how he saved my uncle's life, the reason of his leaving Jamaica, and his subsequent distress in England. I should not neglect to tell you, that his grief on my uncle's death was equal to my own; and though I offered to double the independence my uncle had left him, he declined it, entreating that he might never leave me. 'Do not banish me, madam,' said he; 'I am almost sixty years old, and shall die with grief if I am again driven into the world.'

"You will easily suppose he was not necessitated to press his suit; I assured him he was free to choose, and in consequence he remains my confidential servant, and I do not blush to add—my friend."

Fanny and Agnes then retired to their chamber; after which, Godwin and Mrs. Palmer conversed for some time, both coinciding in their fears that

Agnes

Agnes would hardly survive the event that was now almost daily expected—a thought that wounded Godwin to the soul, and grieved the friendly Mrs. Pal mer.

CHAPTER XI.

ON the morning following, Mrs. Palmer arose early, and taking leave of Godwin and the sisters, returned to Inglewood, leaving Felix to execute any commission they might want, or, in case of any alteration, ride over to the Forest; for though he was in years, he was strong, and able to undertake a far longer journey. She likewise desired him to relate such events as might illustrate her own story, and pass the time in her absence.

The evening after her departure, Fanny

Fanny reminded him of the promise, desiring him to take a seat among them, which, however, he declined until much pressed; then drew a chair at a respectable distance, and began as follows:—

"I was born on the Coast of Guinea, and kidnapped from thence when about twelve years old, and brought to Jamaica, where I was exposed to sale. Among others, my late master's father, Mr. Walters, came to view me, but thought me not fit for labour; his son, who was about my own age, was with him, and looked upon me with such compassion, that, sensible of my situation, I could not avoid saying—'If I must be a slave, I had rather be so to you than any other.' I was, however, not understood; my melancholy therefore rather interested him than my words; for running up to his father, he pressed him so warmly to purchase me, that he at length consented. The bargain concluded, I was ordered

to

to follow them home, and introduced to my mistress, who was a West Indian by birth, but had married Mr. Walters, who was an Englishman, when on a visit in that country, where her children had likewise both been born. Education and example had rendered Mrs. Walters harsh and unfeeling; as she was so to her husband and son, you may therefore readily suppose the slaves were not exempt. I know not whether you are acquainted with it, but it is the custom to mark the newly-purchased slaves just above the shoulders with the initials of their owner's name—an operation that is performed by heating a piece of silver, on which the letters are engraven, over a flame of spirits, and pressing it on the back. This ceremony Mrs. Walters always performed herself, affirming, that the slaves never pressed the stamp sufficiently to make the letters legible. After finding numberless faults (at least I judged so by her actions and countenance)

nance) she made ready to give me the usual mark, which, though in reality no more than a common burn, appeared doubly horrid from the preparation. My young master, who was called Henry, was not present, but entered at the moment: I knew not then what he said, yet could plainly understand by his gestures that he was pleading for me, for I was crying bitterly from the mere dread; but I afterwards learned from an old slave who was present, that he insisted to his mother, who, in spite of her temper, was extravagantly fond of him, that his father had bought me for him, and that he had determined I should be marked with his own initials only. A short contention ensued; but my young master got the better, and bore me off with my back unmarked, but his goodness engraven on my heart in far more indelible characters.

"From this time I can truly say I loved him; I wished to learn his language

guage to express my gratitude. He was sensible of my endeavours, and would frequently condescend to teach me my letters; and finding I was not dull, persevered, with an attention uncommon for his youth, until I could write to make myself understood, and read passably well. By this time I was about fourteen, and perfectly understood my situation, which I considered as fixed for life, yet cannot say the thought on my own account gave me much pain; so true it is that kindness and humanity may make even bondage bearable. About this time my mistress, who was extravagantly fond of china, had a present of a valuable set from England, and which was placed on a table in the saloon. One day that my master and mistress were gone some miles on a visit, Mr. Henry and myself were trying who could leap the farthest in the same apartment, when unfortunately he fell against the table, and to-

tally

tally demolished the whole. For a moment our fears kept us silent; to conceal it was impossible; and we well knew that her rage would exceed all bounds. At length we agreed to retire to a pavilion in the farthest part of the garden, until the first storm should be blown over, and that Mr. Henry should present himself, and express his contrition. We accordingly went thither; I could not but see that this silly accident made him uneasy, and racked my mind how to exculpate him from any share of the blame. At length, having remained until we were assured my mistress must have been some time returned, and have discovered the mischief, as she always sat in the saloon, I proposed that I should repair to the house, and discover how she bore the loss; if with calmness, I would wait for him at home; but if, on the contrary, she was outrageous, I was to return in the course of an hour, and let him know. He consented to

this

this conditionally; I was, as the secret was entirely between us, not to confess I was even present when it happened, but to say my young master had told me of the misfortune, and was under great concern for it.

"This plan settled, I returned home: but I know no terms strong enough to paint the confusion I was witness to: all the slaves had been called, and accused with the mischief, but their innocence alone had been a poor defence; she had buffeted and struck them with her own hand, Mr. Walters in vain endeavouring to pacify her. I entered at this moment. I was a new object; screaming with passion, she exclaimed —'It is this young villain that has done it! I see it by his face! I will have him flayed alive.' Summoning all my courage, which I confess was inferior to the love I bore Mr. Henry (for had not the latter supported me, I should certainly have relinquished my purpose), I replied

—'If

—'If I have done it, madam, I am willing to pay the forfeiture.'

'And pay it you shall,' furiously exclaimed she; and without further question, ordered me to be taken into the court and severely whipped. Had not my pride supported me at that moment, I know not what might have happened; but the idea of shewing my young master of what I was capable of bearing to screen him from blame, rendered me equal to the effort, and I accompanied the men who were to punish me without resistance, tears, or entreaties, my mistress, with an inhumanity unbecoming her sex, placing herself at a window to see her commands properly obeyed. I was tied to a post, my crime proclaimed aloud, my back uncovered, and the scourge raised to strike, when Mr. Henry rushed so suddenly between myself and the executioner, that he could not withhold his hand; the blow fell on his shoulders, and dyed his cotton waist-

coat

coat (which, except a shirt, was his only covering) with blood. Distracted at the sight, I cried aloud, and struggling with violence, broke the cord that held me, covering his body with my own; but there was no occasion; the man who inflicted the punishment stood aghast, without attempting another stroke, my mistress at the same time making the colonnade resound with her screams.— 'Strike,' said my young master, 'I alone am guilty—think you I will see another punished for it? If the paltry china must have a victim, let it be me. I am the offender, and if blood must be the expiation, it shall be mine.'

"The behaviour of my young master put an entire stop to the business; my mistress was shocked, and ordering me to my work, called Mr. Henry to attend her to her chamber, where, seeing her weep as his shoulder was bathed with spirits, he said—'Ah, madam, hereafter remember, that the unhappy men whom fortune

fortune has placed at your command, have also equal feeling, and perhaps parents who may contemplate their wounds with as much anguish as you do mine.'

"Mr. Henry, almost immediately on my leaving him, had followed me: he feared I should incur his mother's anger for only bearing the news, and throwing off all fear, generously determined to meet the storm himself. In a word, he arrived in the critical moment I noticed, saved me from the stroke of the whip, and wrote a fresh obligation on my heart.

"The favour of my young master procured me the kindness of the slaves; and from this time until I was near twenty, at which period my master and mistress were unhappily killed, my situation was far from unpleasant.

"The estates adjoining to my master's were very extensive, and belonging to two gentlemen particularly disliked—the one employed about two hundred negroes, and the other a yet superior

number.

number. These men, from repeated provocations, had formed the design of rising and revenging themselves on their persecutors, and accordingly seizing an opportunity which they thought favourable, they joined, and executed their purpose, killing their tyrants, and deluging the estates with the blood of their oppressors.

" This event had been planned by the slaves of both plantations, and who, having satiated their vengeance at home, hastened to the estate of Mr. Walters, which they reached by break of day, (and whose wife, I am grieved to say, was particularly disliked), and removing all opposition, rushed in, and sacrificed both her and her too-complying husband to their resentment.

" My young master's apartment was on the other side of the yard, and I, by his own desire, lay in the antichamber; the noise awakened us, and hastening to the window, what was our alarm to see

the carnage that had taken place! Mr. and Mrs. Walters, dead, naked and disfigured, were carried and exposed in the open court, together with several overseers, whom the negroes considered as their oppressors. The sight was too much for an affectionate and dutiful son; he fell on the ground in a state of insensibility, which, dearly as I loved him, I at that moment thought happy. After hastening to fasten the doors of all the outward apartments, I returned to the window, where I had the mortification to see that many of our own slaves had joined them; and, though not absolutely active, were at least passive in the mischief. Throwing up the window, I cried aloud to be heard, but the general confusion for some time rendered it impossible.—'Give us your young master,' cried the strange slaves; 'we have dug up the root, and will cut down the branch.'

"With these words they advanced to the outward door, and all hope nearly

forsook

forsook me, when calling aloud to several of our own people by name, I said—'Hear me but a moment; I have something material to say; I will then throw open the doors, and leave you to act as you please.'

"I have already said I was fortunate enough to be beloved by the companions of my slavery, and the present instance proved it; for, crying aloud, they stayed their companions, and entreated I might be heard, saying, I was their countryman and a desirable ally, as I not only understood the use of fire-arms, but could also decypher the thoughts of Europeans, as they expressed them in black characters on white paper, and by that means might forewarn them of threatened danger, if any such communication should fall into their hands. Fortunately this reason procured a short cessation from violence, and I was permitted to speak; when addressing particularly our own people, who were about two hun-

dred, I said, as nearly as I can recollect —'Friends, countrymen, and fellow-sufferers, it is an European saying, that time and chance happeneth to all; in you it is verified; the present time is yours, and your enemies are crushed beneath your feet—but may not hereafter the same chance make you the vanquished?—for what so variable as fortune? Not even the moon itself is half so inconstant; then, may not they redouble our hardships, and plead for excuse that we set the example of blood, and are only to be ruled with a rod of iron? Their powers and resources in this island are numerous: what are ours?—a herd of naked, unarmed men, whose sole defence against their numerous engines of death is bodily strength and undaunted courage—poor auxiliaries to ward off the thunder of their cannon, or yet more certain musket-shot. You have been cruelly oppressed, I confess it, but your tyrants have paid the forfeit; their blood rest

rest upon their heads! To the slaves of this plantation I would simply direct a question:—What has Henry Walters done? If he is the son of one of your oppressors, is that his fault? Is he to suffer for the errors of his parents? Let the man speak whom he has injured, and I here pledge my truth to his, to yield him instantly to his power. It is not you, Peter, for I remember he saved you at the expence of blows from his mother; nor is it you, Cæsar, for when you were ill, how tenderly did he visit you, supplying all your wants unknown to the family! You, Juba, I think, he purchased with the money given him to expend in pleasure, because with your former master you were harshly treated; it is not, therefore, you; nor yet Stephen there, for I remember when his wife and child lay dying of the smallpox, though he had never had that infectious distemper, he came to see them, brought them wine, and when they died he wept.'

 " I here

"I here paused a moment, but all being silent, I resumed—'If none answer, I must then presume none have been offended:—why then do ye seek the life of one who never wronged ye? For me, my friends, I freely declare, my own safety is not dearer than his. Ingratitude is not a negro vice, it is the produce of colder climates; he is my friend; his shoulders yet bear the scar of the whip that would otherwise have marked mine; pain with him was not to be put in competition with truth—he saved me at the expence of himself. I have no more to say—he is in this apartment: vain would be our struggles against a multitude—we will make none. I will, as I promised, unbar the doors, and, if your hearts will let you, kill the truest friend you have among the Christian men, and stab the bosom who would willingly bleed to give you liberty and happiness, for I will not survive him—we will die together.'

"With

"With these words I opened the doors. My master, who had recovered the first shock, advanced to meet them, presenting his breast, and saying—'I am prepared—strike.' My countrymen, at these words, set up a loud cry, exclaiming—'Live, white man—live to conquer black man by humanity!'

"Soon after this the strangers began to disperse, our own men who had been in any means instrumental to the mischief accompanying them, the rest hanging their heads in mournful silence, or falling at my master's feet, and entreating his compassion and pardon.

"My master, soon after this event, sailed for England, and settled there; the melancholy scene that had passed had disgusted him with Jamaica; he therefore sold off the greater part of his possessions, reserving only one small plantation, whose situation he was particularly fond of.

"At the earnest entreaty of the ne-

groes, he made me the overseer; first giving me my liberty, and investing me with the entire command.

"I was very unwilling to be left behind; but my dear master so clearly pointed out that my stay nearly concerned his interest and the quiet of the plantation, that I consented. For twenty years I fulfilled the duty he enjoined me, with great satisfaction to him and also to those over whom he had given me command; and if I have any thing in the world to boast of, it is, that by mild measures, fifty negroes on our plantation did as much labour as double that number on most others. During the period before-mentioned I had seen my master four times, in the last of which he informed me he should, in the year following, go to India. Alas! you know the event of that voyage—I even now tremble at the recollection; the news of his being cast away, I can truly assure you, was sincerely lamented by all

all his dependants; but how much more, I leave you to judge, was their sorrow increased, when, the year after, they received the dreadful tidings that the plantation was to be sold, and the labourers disposed of to the best bidder! For myself, I was ordered to England, to render up my accounts. With a heavy heart I bade adieu to my faithful companions; and on my arrival in England, immediately repaired to the house of my master's brother-in-law; but what a difference in manners!—Mr. Sommerton was narrow-minded and avaricious; and having examined my accounts, which he found perfectly just, he discharged me entirely from his employ, presenting me with five guineas in recompence for my services. I well knew my master had a niece, but what had I to expect from her, when her father had treated me so inhumanly? for had he only empowered me to go to Jamaica, many gentlemen would have been glad to employ me.

Thank Heaven, however, he did not, for by that means I not only met my generous mistress, whom I did not even know by name, but also my revered and lamented master.

"Stranger in England, new to the customs and manners, I at first found it difficult to get employ; but, after some time, was seldom at a loss, the gardeners and farmers about Islington almost constantly employing me. Here it was, as I believe you are informed, that I first met with Mr. Palmer, and had some difficulty to persuade an apothecary to walk into the fields to bleed him, and which I verily believe he would not have done, but from shame of my offering him a dollar to keep until he was paid for his trouble. Alas! nothing but the distress of a fellow-creature could have forced me to make the offer, for the dollar was presented me by Mr. Walters, on the day he rescued me from being marked on the back, since which period I had

ever

ever worn it in my bosom, having drill ed a hole, and fastened it to a ribbon for that purpose.

"When I met my long-lost master at the watchmaker's, his person was so altered that it totally escaped my recollection; yet the sound of his voice attracted my attention, and made me anxiously examine his features, which, though I found exactly formed like those of the person I lamented, yet the difference of ten years, complexion, and grey hairs, deadened my hopes, until he blessed me with a certainty, by calling me the preserver of his life.

"To paint my joy is impossible: let it suffice, that I confess it the most happy day I ever experienced,. save one, that on which I enjoyed the pleasure of recalling to the minds of my countrymen the virtues of their master. Often has he flattered me by naming me the preserver of his life; but it was his goodness and gratitude alone that gave rise

 to

to the idea. His virtues alone preserved him; they wanted only to be remembered, to operate in their full force."

When Felix ceased, Mr. Godwin arose, and stretching out his hand, said —"To express the sentiments your narrative has inspired, would, I am sure, be displeasing to you; I can therefore only say, that for the time I have to live, I shall be much gratified by being ranked among the number of your friends."

Felix took the offered hand, pressed it to his bosom, and expressed his gratitude.

"Ah!" said Agnes, softly to Fanny, "I would compound for all men's faces to be like Felix's, to make them equally virtuous."

Fanny too expressed the satisfaction the narrative had given her, after which the conversation took a more general turn,

turn, the favourite topic, however, being Mrs. Palmer's goodness, numberless instances of which Felix repeated; and among others told them, that not only Mrs. Smith, where they now were, but also her brother, the surgeon, were totally indebted to her for their present happiness, which he concluded by observing they were perfectly deserving of.

From this evening Felix rose considerably in the opinion of the family, Godwin ever assiduously seeking his company, and frequently beguiling his sorrow for an hour by his conversation.

CHAPTER XII.

At length the hour arrived when the unhappy Agnes was to feel the pangs of a mother; her strength, before exhausted, and her spirits sunken, she was ill able to bear the struggle of nature, which was long and dreadful, being attended with repeated faintings and returns of delirium, that left little hopes of her recovery, should she even live to be delivered. The kind and attentive Fanny, almost equally agonized, kept close to her side, praying, whispering comfort, and entreating her beloved sister to support her spirits, and forget every thing, but—that on her recovery depended the happiness of her friends.

At length the practitioner, who was particularly

particularly skilful, delivered her of a living daughter, which he gave into the hands of the trembling Fanny, who, pressing it to her bosom wept over it in agony, Agnes being insensible for several hours that she was a mother.

When the child was presented to Mr. Godwin, he received it in his arms; and raising his eyes to heaven, exclaimed—"May the blessing of an old man, offspring of sorrow, hover over thee!—may thou never feel the ingratitude of a beloved son, nor the shame of a deluded daughter!—may peace and innocence attend thy steps!—and, to conclude, may thou be more virtuous than thy father, and happier than thy mother!"—As he ended, he pressed its face with his lips, and returned it to Fanny, who, laying it tenderly to sleep, was soon after obliged to retire to her own bed, which was in the same room with that of her sister.

Agnes

Agnes slept long and heavily during the night after her delivery; but the effort had been too much for Fanny, who grew so ill, that Mrs. Smith, who sat up with them, thought it necessary to call in the medical practitioner, who declared, that the emotion and fatigue she had sustained had brought on a premature labour, and in two hours delivered her of a dead child.

Agnes was perfectly collected when she awoke, though disturbed by the general confusion; and sensible of what had passed, the pangs of her sister redoubled her own. Weeping over her sleeping infant—" Alas! child of sorrow and shame!" cried she, " thy birth has cost the life of one who might have been the pride of its parents, and produced to the world with honour, while thou, unhappy babe," continued she, " if thou livest, wilt be scorned by the rigid virtuous, and pitied by the gentle. Ah!

may the same hour that closes thy unhappy mother's eyes, close also thine! and in my bosom thy *innocent* shame be buried with my weakness!"

Fanny, who was declared in no danger if kept quiet, ordered her bed to be placed close to that of Agnes; and taking the infant to her affectionate bosom, soon forgot she had given birth to a dead child.

Mr. Godwin, on the first alarm, had sent Felix to Inglewood, and who returned the next day with William and Mrs. Palmer.

William at once felt the sorrow of a dutiful son, a tender brother, and an affectionate husband. His father's health was visibly on the decline; Agnes grew daily weaker; his beloved Fanny was confined to her bed; and he had lost the second pledge of her affection.

Godwin led the way into the apartment, and casting his eyes mournfully around, said, in a low voice—"Alas, Edwin, couldst thou but see this, thy work, it surely would awaken thee to repentance!"

Mrs Palmer drew near the bed of Agnes, and seeing her overcome with confusion, took her hand, saying—"Banish your fears, my good girl—I came but to endeavour to speak peace to your wounded spirit; I have long learned to distinguish between guilt and weakness; yours is forgiven by your earthly father, and I have no doubt by your heavenly one: bear up, nor sink under calamity—your life is dear to your friends, and necessary to this little one; endeavour then to overcome the unhappy sensibility that destroys you, and live to fulfil those claims which friendship and paternal care have on your heart."

"It will not be," replied Agnes: "though sensible of the kindness of my friends,

friends, I rejoice that my dismission is at hand, and, like a tired traveller, look forward to the hour of rest. For the little unfortunate I have no fears; if it survives, it will not miss a mother's tenderness," looking on Fanny. "Would you believe it," continued she, "she gives it suck; and, although a child of shame, lulls it to sleep in her virtuous bosom!"

William, who was leaning over the bed of his wife, dropped a tear on her face, and pressing her hand to his lips, said, in a low voice—"Oh, Fanny! how is it possible you can love Edwin's brother?"

"Because I love Virtue," replied Fanny, warmly, "and revere her in William Godwin."

"One thing alone," continued Agnes, after a long pause, during which no one broke silence, "hangs on my spirits: my unhappy child, should its birth transpire, may be claimed by Edwin—

and

and Edwin, though, alas! he must be beloved until my heart shall cease to beat, is not, I fear, virtuous enough to educate a daughter; but what is education, or even example!" looking at Fanny—"all I would therefore ask is, that, as she cannot be produced at the Forest, without divulging my shame, and incurring the danger I dread, that she may be put to nurse under the guidance of Mrs. Smith, who is a good woman; my Fanny will at least see her yearly, or perhaps oftener; and when time shall have obliterated my memory from all suspicion, she will perhaps condescend to take her under her own care, and, at a proper age, tell her the story of her unhappy mother—but conceal her father; for Edwin's child, though unknown, ought to respect him."

Fanny attempted to reply, but Mrs. Palmer prevented her, by saying—"Warmly interested for your family, from the first moment I saw you, I flatter

ter myself I have a proposal to make, which yet may be more agreeable. Fanny has already the cares of a mother, and from her age, those claims may be greatly increased, and sufficient for her to fulfil. I have none of those cares, no fears to apprehend, no scandal to dread, and have frequently wished, as I am fond of children, for one whom I might rear from its infancy, and be witness of the growing virtues I would endeavour to inculcate; for if I failed, at least my heart should exculpate me. I propose then to adopt this little stranger—will hire her a nurse—take her home with me in a short time—guard her during my life with care; and, at my death, place her above those temptations which frequently prove so fatal to poverty."

"Best of women!" exclaimed Godwin, bending his aged knee, "accept an old man's thanks; but that God, whose precepts you follow, can alone requite you."

Mrs. Palmer raised him—"Speak," said she, addressing Agnes—"do you approve my offer?"

Agnes clasped her hands, but could only articulate an almost incoherent blessing.

"I know not," said Fanny, "whether gratitude should compel me to silence, or affection force me to speak; but, sure of favour from all, affection for once shall get the better. From the hour I found my little one was dead, I formed a plan, which, I trust, will meet the approbation of all; it is to substitute this infant for my own, and to take it home as such. My pregnancy," continued she, a slight blush crossing her cheek, "was visible, and known long before I left the Forest; who then can suspect the deception?—surely none. The secret will rest with ourselves and Mrs. Smith, whom we can trust. To your proposal, madam,"

madam," added Fanny, "I would also make a reply, but am unequal to the task; to refuse your generous offer would be to be unworthy of it; let the cares of the first year or two be mine— the rest will more worthily fall on you, and may she live to prove her gratitude!"

Agnes raised her eyes to heaven, and, after struggling a moment with her emotion, exclaimed—"Merciful God! I thank thee; thou forgivest me, or blessings would not thus be multiplied upon me!"

Mrs. Palmer applauded Fanny, warmly saying—"Be it as your tenderness has best devised, most exemplary of sisters! To ask the opinion of either your father-in-law or husband would be superfluous; their eyes sufficiently speak their sentiments: the little one shall be baptized here, and, on your return, acknowledged your child and my goddaughter, which will,

will, in some measure, account for her hereafter residing with me."

The preliminaries thus settled, Mrs. Palmer, as Agnes appeared exhausted, proposed to retire, and was accompanied by Godwin and William; the first in silence contemplating on the arrangement that had taken place, and the latter, in exultation which he could not suppress, blessing the hour that allied him to Fanny.

They were soon after joined by Bernard, who had just arrived, anxious to see his daughters. He was informed of all, and expressed the highest satisfaction at the arrangement, repeating his unpolished thanks with a sincerity that politeness cannot always boast of.

On being introduced to his daughters, he scarcely knew which to caress most, and

and was not a little delighted to find Agnes better than he had dared to hope, the return of her senses being regarded by him as a certain symptom of recovery, embracing both his children, kissing the infant, and assuring the weeping Agnes it was as dear to him as herself.

He then observed that the absence of Godwin and William from the Forest made more inquiries than that of his daughters, and pressed them to return with him the following day, observing, with Mrs. Palmer's leave, the babe might be baptized that evening, and all settled: that when he reached home, he should give out that Fanny had misreckoned her time, and been unexpectedly delivered; and that Agnes was somewhat recovered, and, with her sister, expected to return speedily.

"Ah, my father!" cried Agnes, "I shall indeed speedily return; but never

more shall these eyes behold the Forest of Inglewood. Lay me by Mrs. Godwin —living, she would not have despised me, nor have forbidden my dust to be mingled with hers. Fanny, my beloved Fanny, shall return with my unhappy babe drawing life from her bosom—hers shall return to moulder in mine."

"Why wilt say so?" said Bernard; "thou art better, I am sure, and do not make thy father unhappy—all will yet be well."

Mrs. Palmer changed the discourse, by giving her approbation to Bernard's plan of immediately baptizing the child, that they might return, at least all but Godwin, whom Fanny and Agnes both entreated might remain.

The curate of a neighbouring village was then procured, and the child, by Mrs. Palmer's express desire, baptized after her, Anna Palmer, and truly registered as the daughter

daughter of Edwin Godwin and Agnes Bernard, the generous sponsor first taking the clergyman aside, entrusting him with the unhappy state of the mother, and entreating his secrecy, which he promised.

The ceremony was just concluded, when the medical practitioner entered, and pronouncing Agnes, on the whole, better, and Fanny almost recovered, entreated both might be kept quiet, and soon after took his leave.

The following day Bernard and William departed for the Forest, and soon after Mrs. Palmer, first bidding an affectionate adieu to the sisters, and promising to see them again speedily.

CHAPTER XIII.



EDWIN, as before observed, had determined to get leave of absence, and endeavour to develop all that was passing at Inglewood; he had no doubt but Fanny had revealed to his father the business of Harris, and immediately surmised that the health of Agnes was restored, and she removed from the Forest to be out of his power. Full of this idea, he prepared for his departure, neither the entreaties of his wife, nor yet the fascination of Mrs. Whitmore, having power to alter his purpose, or even to procure intelligence where he was going, Harris alone being in the secret. Mrs. Godwin, whose temper was naturally violent, and whose conduct had proved how much she was attached to Edwin, could

could ill brook such constant neglect, from a man she had raised even to the height of his own wishes; and having in vain tried entreaties, could no longer conceal the sentiments his conduct inspired, and gave free vent to her anger, reprobating her own folly and his ingratitude in the strongest terms; all of which had no effect but increasing his dislike to her, and forcing expressions, that wounded her in proportion as she loved him. In short, the agitation of her mind brought on a fever, which raged with such violence that her life was pronounced in the greatest danger, and Edwin's journey in consequence stopped, not from affection, but merely to preserve appearances. Harris, however, he immediately sent off to Mr. Jeremiah Jenkins, to procure all possible intelligence, and endeavour to discover the retreat of Agnes. Mrs. Godwin's fever, from its first appearance, had been declared of the malignant kind, and on the tenth day manifested the

most alarming symptoms: Edwin was, therefore, with all due preliminaries, desired to prepare for an event which gave him the highest pleasure in expectancy —the death of his wife. His conscience would, indeed, in spite of all his endeavours, be troublesome, and present his ingratitude in strong and glaring colours; but these qualms were more than counterbalanced by the rapturous idea of being at liberty to address Agnes, whose forgiveness he could not doubt, circumstanced as they were, and he possessed of a fortune which, even disinterested as she was, could not fail of having its proper weight.

The cold severity of his father, and the warm resentment of William, gave him some uneasiness; but even these he thought could be easily surmounted; he should represent his former conduct as an error he was unwarily drawn into, and throw himself totally on the mercy

of

of Agnes. Notwithstanding these meditations, he was so good an adept in the art of dissimulation, as to conceal his pleasurable sentiments under the specious guise of concern and tenderness, attending his wife with an unwearied care, which was applauded by the spectators, and highly grateful to the unhappy object, who still loved him well enough to believe every excuse he chose to advance for his past conduct, and every asseveration for the future, if she was spared to him.

Thus, for her own satisfaction, happily deceived, she forgave all, and expired as he was seated by her side, the unhappy victim of a misplaced affection, to which she had first sacrificed her person and fortune, and lost her life.

Though this event was more wished than dreaded by Edwin, yet, when it arrived, it made an impression which he

could not immediately shake off, particularly as he had no pleasurable resources in his own mind to banish the uneasy sensation, nor could in such a case seek them abroad.

Mrs. Godwin had particularly desired to be carried to the family vault of her parents, in Leicestershire; and partial, even in her last moments, to the unworthy object of her affection, had requested he would attend her remains, all which he faithfully promised, and as truly performed.

During Mrs. Godwin's illness Edwin had heard twice from Harris, but nothing satisfactory, except that it was reported Agnes's unhappy malady was rather decreased, and that she had only been removed for change of air.

Possessed of this intelligence, he attended his wife's funeral, which was no sooner over than he returned post to London, determined to settle his affairs with all possible dispatch, repair to Inglewood,

glewood, procure his pardon, abjure his errors, and wed Agnes, as soon as her consent, and decency, would allow.

He felt the influence wealth had on his own heart, and doubted not but it must also have some on that of Agnes, and therefore determined on what he thought a master-stroke to silence all reproaches. This was no other than causing a deed to be properly executed, by which he endowed her, on their marriage, with the entire command and disposal of the sum of ten thousand pounds, which was more than the half of his property; and that he thought a full compensation for past errors, and what must effectually silence all present objections.

Thus prepared, he determined to depart, and join his servant at Jenkins's, make every necessary inquiry, then act accordingly; but the evening previous to his journey received the following letter from Harris:—

 "SIR,

"SIR,

"I have been indefatigable in the business in which you employed me, and hope this time to retrieve my error at Inglewood. All my inquiries to discover the retreat of the sisters were fruitless, until yesterday morning, when I saw a chaise pass the inn full speed, followed by your brother, and soon after by the negro whom Jenkins mentioned. I lost no time, but mounting my horse, kept them in view the whole day; and towards evening saw them stop at a small house near Richmond, where your brother handed out a lady, and dismissed the chaise.

"As this plainly proved it the place of their destination, I rode into the town, entered an inn, and having ordered supper, asked several questions, and among others, describing the house, and pretending to admire the situation, inquired to whom it belonged? The waiter replied, it was originally purchased by a lady of

great

great fortune, but who was supposed to have given it to a Mrs. Smith, the widow of a sea-officer, and sister of a surgeon in the town, whose name having inquired, I ceased my questions, fearful of incurring suspicion. The next morning, being for your service, sir, conveniently seized with a bilious complaint, I walked to the doctor's, to procure a medicine, or rather intelligence, but found the principal was engaged with his patients, and a deputy, exactly suited to my wishes, left in care of the shop.

" After drinking one of his infernal potions, which nothing but my respect to you, sir, could have made me swallow, I retired, entreating he would call on me at my inn, in half-an-hour, as I assured him my disorder sometimes increased very suddenly, and required immediate assistance. The fellow was punctual; but being quite recovered by the first salutary draught, I generously, sir, as I knew you would approve, presented him with

with a couple of guineas for himself, and called for a bottle of wine. In short, sir, the money and my elocution charmed him; and the wine warming his heart, he grew communicative, and before we had finished the second bottle, perfectly understood each other—he answering my questions as readily as I asked them. His master, he said, was a close old fellow, whom it would be useless to interrogate; and that for his own part, he knew little of the ladies at Mrs. Smith's, except that one had just recovered from a melancholy state of insanity, but was supposed in the last stage of a consumption; yet, on the whole, she was, he heard his master say the evening before, better than he had seen her. Not being able to procure more satisfactory information, I dismissed him, having first finished another bottle, and obtained his promise of calling on me again in the evening. I was, however, much vexed and disappointed, for he returned

in an hour miserably drunk; and, with a melancholy face, informed me his employer had discharged him, in consequence of his being in liquor.

"Sincerely vexed at this, I entreated him to go back, and endeavour to make his peace; but he assured me his master was so obstinate a dog, it would be of no avail; nor did he, as he said, much care, as he had long purposed to go to London. Thus obliged to acquiesce, I bade him farewell, and sat down to give you this information, waiting your orders at the Angel Inn in this town, and not venturing near Mrs. Smith's, lest I should be discovered by your brother's wife, and give suspicion. Waiting your answer with impatience,

"I am, SIR,

"Your humble servant,

"EDWARD HARRIS."

Edwin had no sooner read this letter, than instantly ordering a postchaise and four,

four, he departed, travelling day and night until he had reached Richmond, rejoicing at the intelligence that Agnes's senses were restored; and never doubting but, as her malady proceeded from his falsehood, his return, ready to espouse her on any terms, would remove it.

At first he thought of writing to his father or Agnes, but soon relinquished that project, saying, as he considered on the subject—" No, no, a personal interview, and that unexpected, will be most decisive for me; a letter would be only productive of a consultation, in which cold prudence would be predominant, and our meeting protracted; while, on the contrary, if I take them unprepared, on my knees entreat to be heard, plead for pardon, and promise never more to err, nature will at once incline my father to pity, and love force my Agnes to forgive, and once more receive my vows — vows which I henceforward mean to hold sacred, for where can I find

find such another angel? Methinks I already feel the exultation I shall experience on presenting her to the world—she universally admired—myself universally envied; thus at once gratifying both my pride and love."

The ill state of health of Agnes would now and then intrude, but elated with the flattering picture ardent fancy had painted, he endeavoured to cast off all uneasy reflections, and think alone of the pleasure that awaited him.

On his arrival at Richmond, he ordered the postboy to the inn Harris had mentioned, and found him waiting for either a letter or his arrival; he could, however, inform him nothing farther than what he before knew, except that he believed there were none of the male part of the Inglewood family at Mrs. Smith's, as William and Bernard had passed him on horseback on the high road the afternoon he wrote the letter which brought Edwin with such speed and

and who arrived at Richmond the seventh day after Agnes's delivery.

This news was not unpleasing to Edwin; he flattered himself he should be more successful by taking Agnes alone, or at least only supported by Fanny; and therefore, regardless of fatigue, he determined to lose no time, but visit them that very evening.

Harris would have dissuaded him from this step, as it was late, and he apparently much tired, but in vain; he ordered him to shew him the house, which before they reached, it was nine o'clock, and the night completely dark.

Arrived at the gate, Edwin dismissed his servant, and entered the court before the door. An unusual tremor seized him as he raised his hand to pull the bell; and withdrawing it without the effort, he paused a moment to reflect and recover his emotion.—"Why do I tremble thus?" said he. "What have I so much to dread, or whose frowns need

need I fear? An hour's anger will be the most of the business, or a few reproaches, which I shall long to silence, while uttered from the beautiful lips of my Agnes: away then with this childish folly; I am determined to conquer, and triumph over every difficulty."

During this soliloquy he was walking round the house, the garden of which joined the fore-court, and completely surrounded the dwelling.

In the back-front was a door; and what gave no small pleasure, it was half open. Determined, if possible, to discover whom he had to expect to meet with, he cautiously entered, and for a moment stood still to listen; but all was dark and quiet, except on one side, in a parlour fronting the garden, where he perceived a light under the door. Emboldened by the solitude around, he advanced, and lent an attentive ear, but no sound reached it. His eye was next applied to the keyhole; but the apartment

ment was apparently deserted, though he could not see to the farther end, but plainly perceived two large candles burning on a table in the centre. At that moment he heard a walking over head, and was on the point of retiring hastily; but again all was still, and he regained his post.

He now repented that he had not written first to Agnes, to inform her of all that had passed—his contrition and intention—but it was too late.—"Yet," continued he, after a pause, "as I am so ridiculously weak to-night, I am half inclined to retire, first leaving on the table in this apartment the deed which makes the greater part of my fortune over to Agnes; I have it in my pocket. It will shew her I am free to offer her my heart, and prepare her for my reception to-morrow. It is sealed and directed, so there can be no danger of leaving it; or should it by any means fall into other hands, it would be useless—fortu-

nate

nate thought! it will save me a world of explanations, nor can she be insensible to it. I am to-night overpowered with fatigue, and shall to-morrow urge my suit with redoubled ardour."

Thus resolved, he opened the door with caution, and, convinced the apartment was empty, advanced; but a scene at once presented that struck him with astonishment and horror, for on the side of the room he had not before seen, stood on trestles a coffin, simply decorated with the usual insignia of death. A cold sweat bedewed his forehead, his knees knocked together, and for some moments his feet seemed rooted to the ground. At length—"What business had I here?" exclaimed he; "yet what is this to me? Cannot people die without causing me this alarm? I blush at my folly to be thus startled at the sight of a mere wooden case; yet, merciful God! should it contain my father, for he was said to be ill! but, fool that I am!

am! he is doubtless at Inglewood. Distraction!" continued he, viewing the coffin, without approaching it; " I can bear no more! Away, foolish fear! I will be satisfied, whatever be the consequence."

With these words he approached, and, with a forced courage, snatched one of the candles from the table, and advanced towards the object of his terror, twice raising his hand before he could find strength to remove the lid; which at length pushing aside, regardless of the inscription, he discovered, in the calm sleep of death, the beautiful and once blooming Agnes, with an infant on her bosom.

END OF VOL. II.

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